Prostate Cancer Guide

A resource to help answer your questions about prostate cancer
Thank you for downloading this guide to prostate cancer treatment.

We know that all the information provided online can be overwhelming. We created this guide to summarize the important information and give you a better understanding of cancer treatment. Use this guide to help you ask questions, take notes and know what to expect.
Diagnosis and pre-treatment

Getting an accurate diagnosis and staging of cancer is a critical first step. To do this, your doctor may take a biopsy. Then, a team of expert pathologists and radiologists who specialize in prostate cancer will review the biopsy to help determine the next steps in your treatment.

What’s a biopsy?
During a biopsy, very tiny samples (1 millimeter thick) of your prostate gland are removed. The samples are taken from several areas of the gland. You’ll be given local anesthesia to numb the area first. The samples are sent to a lab for examination. Pathologists who specialize in analyzing these tissue samples will examine the sample to determine whether it’s cancerous or not.

Why get a biopsy?
Cancer isn’t the only cause of a high PSA level (Prostate Specific Antigen) and/or abnormalities in the prostate gland, so it’s important to find out whether the results of your PSA test or other exam are because of cancer or something else.

Very accurate technology
Vanderbilt offers 3-D MRI fusion targeted biopsy. This is the most sophisticated technology available for prostate cancer diagnosis. This technique combines 3-D images with real-time ultrasound imaging, magnetic resonance imaging, and robotics to provide very accurate biopsies that take samples from parts of the prostate that appear abnormal. (Imaging is taking pictures of the inside of the body.)

To make an appointment, please visit VanderbiltProstateCancer.com or call (888) 523-2291.
Older biopsy methods are “blind,” meaning samples are taken from the prostate without being able to see which parts of the gland look healthy and which are possibly cancerous. That leads to many “false negative” biopsies—results that say there is no prostate cancer when in fact there are small areas of cancerous tissue.

Biopsies done with 3-D MRI fusion technology give more accurate information about the condition of the prostate, which allows for better treatment and management of the disease. The doctor can aim the biopsy at the areas most likely to harbor cancer. The 3-D capability creates a map of abnormal spots in the prostate. Real-time ultrasound allows a highly accurate target for the biopsy.

**What's involved?**

Prostate biopsies are done on an outpatient basis, meaning you won’t have to spend a night in the hospital. Afterward, you may feel pain and have some bleeding. There is a small risk of infection from the biopsy.

Personalized treatment for every patient

There are many effective treatments for prostate cancer available at Vanderbilt. Our team of prostate cancer experts will develop the best possible course of treatment for you, taking factors such as your health, age, lifestyle, and the physical demands of your job into account. You’ll receive personalized care that may include one or more of the following types of treatment:

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Active surveillance

Active surveillance isn’t the same as “doing nothing.” It involves closely watching the cancer and, if necessary, taking action before it can spread or cause other problems. It also involves continuing with blood work, biopsies and genomic testing. Genomics uses the tumor’s DNA to help doctors understand what’s fueling its growth and to create a treatment plan that’s customized to your cancer. Since most prostate tumors grow slowly, using active surveillance also gives you time to evaluate your options while your healthcare team watches the cancer.

Radiation

There are many types of radiation therapy. Radiation can also be combined with other kinds of treatment. Below are a few examples:

**Brachytherapy**

Also called internal radiation therapy, this treatment involves the placement of radioactive “seeds” inside the prostate gland. The seeds aim a strong dose of radiation at the tumor but have little impact on healthy cells near the tumor. The seeds are left inside the prostate permanently, and over time they stop giving off radiation.

**External-beam radiation therapy**

This treatment involves using a machine to aim radiation from outside the body at the cancerous cells. Patients do not stay overnight at the hospital for this type of radiation. At Vanderbilt, we use photon beam radiation therapy as opposed to proton beam radiation therapy. Photons and protons are types of radiation particles that kill prostate cancer. They are equally effective in killing prostate cancer cells.

**Intensity-modulated radiation therapy**

This is a type of external radiation that can be customized to the shape and size of the tumor. It can give stronger doses of radiation to some parts of the tumor. It is now considered the standard of care, meaning it’s the best practice for treating prostate cancer. We place markers...
into the prostate to help aim the radiation and make it more precise, which spares surrounding healthy tissue from unnecessary damage.

**Image-guided radiotherapy**

This technique uses imaging (X-rays or CT scans) to help technicians aim radiation at the tumor very precisely. It protects nearby tissue from much of the radiation.

**Stereotactic radiosurgery**

This is a non-surgical procedure that requires only a single or few treatments because it precisely targets the tumor and delivers radiation at much higher doses than traditional methods.

**Surgery**

Surgery is an option if the cancer has not spread beyond the prostate. Surgery involves operating on the prostate to remove the tumor. There are several different ways a doctor can perform this surgery. Surgeons may choose to perform open surgery themselves or use robotic surgery, which involves a robot that is controlled by the surgeon.

Vanderbilt Urology is one of the busiest robotic prostate surgery centers in the United States. Research shows that high-volume centers have better outcomes. You can breathe easier knowing that having your procedure at Vanderbilt maximizes your chances of a good result.

Some of the benefits of robotic surgery:

- removing cancer cells quickly and easily
- less invasive than open surgery
- smaller incision
- quicker recovery
- less vulnerable to infection
- reduces damage to healthy tissue
- minimal scarring

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Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses drugs injected through a vein to fight cancer cells. This treatment is usually for cancer that has spread beyond the prostate gland, but it can sometimes be used after radiation therapy for higher-risk prostate cancer that has not spread. After patients receive chemotherapy, they will have several medicines to use at home to prevent side effects. These supportive medications have truly changed the experience of receiving chemotherapy by allowing us to prevent many side effects that patients experienced in the past.

Hormone therapy

Hormones are chemicals made by glands that accomplish certain tasks in the body. Male sex hormones (testosterone and other androgens) can encourage the growth of prostate tumors. Hormone therapy may be used in combination with surgery or radiation to increase the likelihood of curing prostate cancer in some cases. It can also be used for men with prostate cancer that has spread outside of the prostate to stop the tumor from growing. The most common form of hormone therapy is injected, and patients take additional hormone therapy drugs by mouth.

Cryotherapy

“Cryo” means freezing. In cryotherapy (sometimes called cryoablation), a surgeon uses very cold gas to freeze the prostate gland. This technique is usually meant for smaller tumors and prostate cancer that has spread only to areas immediately surrounding the prostate.

Evaluating your treatment options

Please talk to your doctor to understand the pros and cons of your different treatment options.

Click here to learn more about cancer treatment >
Our prostate cancer team

At a research-based cancer center such as Vanderbilt, you have the benefit of seeing many experts who specialize in specific types of cancer. Our doctors are prostate cancer experts. They will develop a custom treatment plan based on your case and your unique needs. Our team includes specialists in urologic surgery, radiation oncology and medical oncology.

Urologic surgeons

For patients whose cancer has not spread outside the prostate, surgery can be an option to remove the cancer. The urologist is the doctor who will operate to remove the cancer, as long as the tumor has not spread to other parts of the body.

Radiation oncologist

A radiation oncologist uses a form of treatment that sends high doses of radiation to cancer cells. A high dose of radiation makes small breaks inside the cell. These breaks work like roadblocks against the movement of cancer, helping to stop the cancer from spreading and dividing into other cells. Patients can be treated with radiation for localized prostate cancer that has not spread outside the prostate or if they have prostate cancer in a bone or other place that is causing pain.

Medical oncologist

A medical oncologist is a doctor who specializes in analyzing and treating cancer. He or she can use various types of medications given as injections or by mouth to treat prostate cancer, including hormone therapy, chemotherapy and immunotherapy. A medical oncologist is usually your main health care provider if you have prostate cancer that has come back after initial treatment or has spread.

Our team is your team

Our doctors work together with you and your family to identify the best treatment for your cancer. Our experts study unique types of cancer and meet regularly to discuss cases and share knowledge.

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These meetings are called “tumor boards.” At Vanderbilt, there are many tumor boards offering very focused expertise. Our urologic cancer tumor board meets regularly to ensure our patients get the most advanced care.

Click here to learn about the cancer physicians at Vanderbilt >

You’ll get extraordinary treatment

Being a patient at Vanderbilt means more than just receiving outstanding care. It also means you’ll be receiving innovative care.

You’ll have access to the latest technology and trials

As an academic medical center, Vanderbilt can offer you access to the latest in technology and treatment. Our powerful research drives our cancer care, so you and your family can rest assured that you are receiving the most advanced care available.

Vanderbilt Urology is one of the busiest robotic prostate surgery centers in the United States. Studies have shown that high-volume centers have better outcomes. Having your surgery at Vanderbilt maximizes your chance of a positive result.

Being treated at a research-focused, National Cancer Institute-designated Comprehensive Cancer Center such as Vanderbilt-Ingram provides you with benefits such as:

- A team of doctors, nurses, and other healthcare professionals who are experts in prostate cancer and who are dedicated to expanding their knowledge and improving their skills in order to better treat you.

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Leading specialists in all types of cancers, from the more common to the rare, so you have access to doctors with expertise in all aspects of cancer care.

Access to innovative therapies through clinical trials not available at other hospitals.

The most sophisticated equipment and technology.

Place your trust in us

We are ranked No. 1 in Tennessee for cancer care by U.S. News & World Report.

We are the only Comprehensive Cancer Center in Tennessee treating patients of all ages to be designated by the National Cancer Institute, the world’s cancer authority.

We are part of the National Comprehensive Cancer Network, a nonprofit alliance of 26 leading centers working together to improve the quality and effectiveness of cancer care.

Unmatched support during and after treatment

No matter what stage of treatment, recovery or remission you’re in, we’re here for you.

What is the REACH for Survivorship Program?
The REACH for Survivorship Program is Middle Tennessee’s first dedicated Cancer Survivorship Clinic. We serve all survivors regardless of age, type of cancer or treatment location.

Click here to get more information on the REACH for Survivorship Program>

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Questions for your doctor

Here are a few questions to consider asking your doctor at your next appointment:

- How quickly do I need to make a decision about treatment?
- Should I consider active surveillance? Why or why not?
- Why do you recommend this treatment?
- Is there anything I should do to get ready for treatment?
- How long will treatment last?
- What will treatment be like?
- Where do I go for treatment?
- Do you recommend more testing and why?
- What are the pros and cons of the treatments we discussed?
- Should I talk to other doctors before deciding what to do?
- Where can I find more information?

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