

Prostate Cancer Treatment Choices

Your treatment options will depend on whether your cancer is contained within the prostate gland, has spread just outside of the prostate or had spread to other parts of the body. You may have a choice of treatments. Your doctor can explain all your treatment options, and help you to choose the right treatment for you. The first treatment you have may affect which treatments you can have in the future, if you need further treatment. Speak to your doctor or nurse about this.

Active Surveillance

Active surveillance is a way of monitoring prostate cancer which aims to avoid or delay unnecessary treatment in men with less aggressive cancer. Many prostate cancers are detected at an early stage. Prostate cancer can be slow growing and, for many men, the disease may never progress or cause any symptoms. Treatments for prostate cancer can cause side effects which can affect your quality of life. By monitoring the cancer, you can avoid or delay these side effects.

Watchful Waiting

Watchful waiting is a way of monitoring prostate cancer that is not causing any symptoms or problems. The aim is to monitor the cancer over the long term because prostate cancer is often slow growing and may not cause you any symptoms or problems in your lifetime.

Surgery: Radical Prostatectomy

Radical prostatectomy is an operation to remove the prostate gland and the cancer contained within it. You may be suitable for this treatment if your cancer is thought to be contained within the prostate gland and you are otherwise fit and healthy.

External Beam Radiotherapy

External beam radiotherapy uses high energy X-ray beams to treat prostate cancer. The X-ray beams are directed at the prostate gland from outside the body. They damage the cancer cells and stop them growing. External beam radiotherapy is sometimes given alongside permanent seed brachytherapy or temporary brachytherapy (internal radiotherapy). Radiotherapy can also be used after surgery if your PSA level starts to rise or if there is a risk that not all the cancer was removed with surgery.

Permanent Seed Brachytherapy

Permanent seed brachytherapy, also known as low dose-rate (LDR) brachytherapy, involves having tiny radioactive seeds implanted in your prostate gland. Radiation from the seeds destroys cancer cells in the prostate. You may have this treatment on its own or together with external beam radiotherapy and/or hormone therapy. It is just as good at controlling prostate cancer as other treatments.

Temporary Brachytherapy

Temporary brachytherapy, also known as high dose-rate (HDR) brachytherapy, involves inserting a source of high dose-rate radiation into the prostate gland for a few minutes at a time to destroy cancer cells. You may have this treatment on its own or you may have it together with external beam radiotherapy and/or hormone therapy. In western Canada, this treatment is only available in Kelowna, BC.

Hormone Therapy

Hormone therapy helps control prostate cancer by stopping the production of testosterone or stopping testosterone reaching the prostate cancer cells. There are different types of hormone therapy available, you may have injections, an operation, tablets or implants. Hormone therapy can cause side effects such as hot flushes, loss of sex drive and tiredness. It is important that you are aware of the side effects before you start treatment.

High Intensity Focused Ultrasound (HIFU)

HIFU uses high frequency ultrasound waves to heat and destroy cancer cells in the prostate. It is a relatively new treatment and we do not know very much about how effective it is at treating prostate cancer in the long-term or how it may affect your everyday life.

Cryotherapy

Cryotherapy treats prostate cancer by using freezing and thawing to kill the cancer cells in the prostate gland. It is also sometimes known as cryosurgery and cryoablation.

Cryotherapy is usually used for men whose prostate cancer has come back after treatment with radiotherapy or brachytherapy (recurrent prostate cancer). It is less commonly offered as a first treatment for prostate cancer. However, it may be an option for men who are unable to have other treatments such as surgery or radiotherapy.

Second line hormone therapy and further treatment options

If your prostate cancer is no longer responding to your original hormone therapy you can have further treatments. You may be able to have other types of hormone therapy, chemotherapy or a new treatment as part of a clinical trial.

Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy uses anti-cancer (cytotoxic) drugs to kill cancer cells. It is used to help control symptoms and not to cure prostate cancer. The side effects of chemotherapy are sometimes difficult to cope with so you need to be reasonably fit before you begin treatment. You may have chemotherapy alongside other treatments such as palliative radiotherapy, bisphosphonates, pain-relieving drugs, and steroids.

New treatments

You may hear stories in the news about new treatments for prostate cancer that has spread outside of the prostate gland (advanced prostate cancer). New medicines include:

Provenge. A vaccine, approved in April 2010 and sold by Dendreon, that primes a man's immune system to attack an existing tumor.

Cabazitaxel. A new form of chemotherapy, approved in June 2010 and sold by Sanofi under the name Jevtana.

Abiraterone. Approved in April 2011, and sold by Janssen under the brand name Zytiga, it deprives tumors of testosterone.

Enzalutamide. Approved in August 2012, enzalutamide, sold under the name Xtandi and developed by Medivation and Astellas Pharma, blocks the ability of testosterone to enhance cancer growth.

Radium 223. Still awaiting FDA approval, this drug from Bayer HealthCare would carry radioactive particles deep into the bone where tumors are spreading, and kill cancer cells.

Clinical Trials

A clinical trial is a type of medical research study that aims to find new and improved ways of preventing, diagnosing, treating and controlling illnesses, such as prostate cancer. Clinical trials involve testing new medicines and procedures on people in a controlled and carefully planned way. Clinical trials are the best way to find out whether a new treatment is better than the current standard treatment.

Radiotherapy for advanced prostate cancer

Men with advanced prostate cancer may have radiotherapy to help relieve symptoms. This is called palliative radiotherapy. Palliative radiotherapy does not aim to get rid of your cancer but it can help to slow down its growth. There are two types of palliative radiotherapy: external beam radiotherapy (EBRT) and internal radiotherapy (radioisotopes).

Bisphosphonates

Bisphosphonates are drugs that can help men with prostate cancer that has spread to the bones and is no longer responding to hormone therapy. They do not actually treat the cancer but they can help to relieve bone pain. They may also help to prevent and slow down the breakdown of bone.