

Active Surveillance of Prostate Cancer

You and your doctor may choose not to treat your prostate cancer, but instead to closely monitor your condition through “active surveillance.”

Most prostate cancer grows very slowly, so there’s usually no need to rush your treatment decisions. Give yourself time to learn about your options. Your course of action will depend on your doctor’s opinion and your feelings about possible side effects. Talk to your doctor if you have questions.

What is active surveillance?

Active surveillance means no medical treatment is provided. Even if you have been diagnosed with prostate cancer, your doctor may advise that the best option is to have no immediate treatment:

- no surgery
- no radiotherapy
- no hormone therapy

How do I know if it’s a good idea for me?

It’s possible to have prostate cancer and not have symptoms for several years. Some men never have symptoms at all.

Active surveillance may be recommended if:

- you don’t have any signs or symptoms;
- your cancer is expected to grow slowly; and
- the cancer is small and confined to one area of the prostate.

Active surveillance is often recommended to older men with low grade prostate cancer. Men in their 70’s and 80’s may have other significant health conditions that pose a greater risk to their health than prostate cancer.

Older men may live out their lives without the prostate cancer spreading and causing problems.

Some men in their 60’s also have slow growing cancer, making active surveillance a good option.

Prostate cancer treatment can reduce quality of life in later years. Many men die with prostate cancer, but not from prostate cancer.

Active surveillance can also be an option for younger men with low grade prostate cancer, but they must be vigilant about follow-up appointments.

Why active surveillance?

For some men, it’s the best option:

- In some cases, prostate cancer is slow growing and may never cause problems.
- Cancer treatment often causes unpleasant side effects, like erectile dysfunction and urinary problems. This option allows you to avoid the risks and side effects associated with treatment.

Your urologist monitors your cancer. If your condition changes, your doctor can advise treatment.

Common concerns

It’s normal to be concerned about not treating cancer. Consider the following questions:

Is active monitoring a way of saving money?

No. Active surveillance is a recognized option for men with prostate cancer. For some men, prostate cancer will not cause symptoms or affect quality of life.



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If you are older and have other significant health problems, you may choose to avoid the likely side effects of cancer treatment.

If your condition changes, your doctor will determine the appropriate treatment.

Will I be forgotten?

No. You will continue to have appointments with your GP and your urologist. This will ensure your condition is closely monitored, and give you opportunities to ask questions.

Will the cancer get worse and spread?

Your condition is being actively monitored. If there are any changes in the cancer, you will be informed and offered the appropriate treatment.

If your doctor believes there is a risk that the cancer may spread, active surveillance will not be an option for you.

If you continue to feel worried about not having immediate treatment, talk to your doctor.

Making your decision

Consider all the information and treatment options offered to you by your urologist.

Make sure you understand what they mean for you. Discuss the pros and cons of active surveillance with your family and your doctor.

Remember that your urologist has recommended active surveillance for sound clinical reasons and it could be the best option for you.

Keep in mind that there is also a risk that taking treatment will cause you to miss the window of opportunity for a cure.

If at any time you are unhappy with your choice or become worried, you can discuss other treatment options with your doctor.

Questions to ask your doctor

- **Is this a good option for me?**
- **Is my cancer slow-growing?**
- **When would a more aggressive treatment be appropriate?**
- **How will the cancer be monitored?**

