

# EARLY PROSTATE CANCER TREATMENT



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Tailored Information in Cancer Care (TICC)  
Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre*

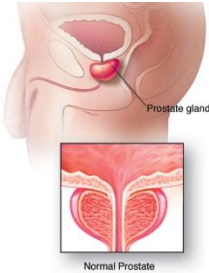
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# Contents

<b>About this booklet</b>	1
<b>Your First Oncology Consultation</b>	2
<b>Active Surveillance</b>	3
<b>Your feelings</b>	6
<b>Treatment options for Early Prostate Cancer</b>	7
Surgery	8
Hormonal therapy	8
Radiotherapy	10
<b>After your treatment</b>	12
Follow-up	12
Sexuality	12
Effects after treatment	14
Lifestyle changes – making positive decisions	15
<b>Important Telephone Numbers</b>	18
<b>Notes</b>	19
<b>Useful resources</b>	20

## About this booklet

This booklet may be useful for men who are starting or having treatment for Early Prostate Cancer.



Early Prostate Cancer refers to prostate cancer which is located only in the prostate gland.

After diagnosis, it helps to know what to expect and where you can get further support.

This booklet includes information about the treatment options for Early Prostate Cancer according to your diagnosis, and other relevant information you may find useful in your cancer journey.

There are different stages of Prostate Cancer, so every patient may require different treatment options and not all information in this booklet may be applicable to your needs. The information in this booklet focuses on Early Prostate Cancer treatments.

This booklet does not replace the information provided by healthcare professionals who will be guiding you throughout your care.

## Your first oncology consultation

Following your referral to Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre, health care professionals will contact you for an appointment with your Oncologist (the specialised doctor who will be managing your cancer treatment). Your Oncologist will discuss with you your treatment options and together, you shall formulate a treatment plan. Based on the treatment decisions, you will encounter relevant healthcare professionals who will support you during your treatment plan and address your informational needs.

You might find it helpful if you write down any questions you may have prior to your oncology consultation.

## Active surveillance

Most low-grade, early-stage prostate cancers are very slow-growing and may never cause any symptoms. For this reason, some men decide with their specialists to wait and see whether the cancer is getting bigger (progressing) before starting any treatment. This period is known as active surveillance.

You will usually have frequent rectal examinations and blood tests every 4-6 months to check your PSA (prostate-specific antigen) levels. You will be asked if you have developed any new symptoms and you may also have prostate biopsies every few years.

If these regular tests show that the cancer is starting to grow, your doctors will recommend treatment that aims to cure the cancer, such as surgery or radiotherapy. If the cancer is not growing or developing, it is safe to continue with active surveillance.

**Advantages:**

Many men who choose active surveillance may avoid the complications and side effects of surgery, radiotherapy or hormonal therapy.

**Disadvantages:**

Some men find it difficult to wait and see whether their cancer progresses before starting any treatment. Some men will need surgery, radiotherapy or hormonal therapy anyway if their cancer shows signs of growth.





## Your feelings

Most people feel overwhelmed when they are told they have cancer and experience many different emotions. Partners, family members and friends often have similar feelings and may also need support and guidance to cope.

Often shock, disbelief, denial, fear and uncertainty, anger, blame and guilt are some of the immediate reactions when cancer is diagnosed. You may feel unable to express any emotion. You may also find that you can take in only a small amount of information or you need to be told the same information repeatedly.

If you are experiencing difficulties in coping with your feelings, you may be referred to the Psychology Department at the Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre.

## Treatment options for Early Prostate Cancer

Treatments used for early prostate cancer include hormonal therapy, radiotherapy and surgery. Often, a combination of treatments is used. Treatment depends on the stage of your cancer, your general health and personal choice.

The stage of the cancer describes its size, position and whether it has spread beyond where it started in the body. Knowing the extent of the cancer helps the doctors guide you on the most appropriate treatment.

Generally, cancer is divided into four stages:

Stage 1 - The cancer is very small and confined to the prostate. It cannot be felt during a rectal examination.

Stage 2 - The cancer can be felt as a hard lump during a rectal examination, but it is still within the prostate gland.

Stage 3 - The cancer has started to break through the outer capsule of the prostate gland and may be in the nearby tubes that transport semen.

Stage 4 - The cancer has spread beyond the prostate gland to nearby structures such as the bladder or back passage (rectum), or to more distant organs such as the bones or liver.

## **Surgery**

Surgery for prostate cancer involves removal of the prostate gland. However, it is important that you understand what it involves, the possible side effects, and whether or not this will be appropriate for you. Your doctor will discuss with you if the surgical procedure is to your benefit.

## **Hormonal therapy**

Hormonal therapy may be given before radiotherapy. This is known as neo-adjuvant therapy, which can help make radiotherapy treatment more effective. Hormonal therapy is also sometimes given after radiotherapy (adjuvant therapy), where the aim is to reduce the chance of the cancer coming back.

Hormonal therapy may be given on its own as a treatment for men who are not fit for surgery or radiotherapy.

Hormones control the growth and activity of normal cells. In order to grow, prostate cancer depends on the hormone testosterone, which is produced by the testicles. Hormonal therapies reduce the amount of testosterone in the body. They can be given as injections or tablets.

### ***Side effects of hormonal therapies***

#### Impotence

Unfortunately, most hormonal therapies usually cause erectile dysfunction (impotence) and loss of sexual desire (libido) for as long as the treatment is given. If the treatment is stopped, the problem **may** disappear but with long-term treatment, this problem will persist. It can help to talk to your partner and doctor about your fears and worries.

#### Hormonal effects

It is common for most men who have hormonal therapy to experience hot flushes and sweating. These side effects will gradually stop following termination of treatment.

#### Other effects

Hormonal treatment can also make you put on weight and feel constantly tired, both physically and

mentally. Some drugs (most commonly flutamide and bicalutamide) may also cause breast swelling and breast tenderness.

Different drugs have different side effects, so it is important to discuss the possible side-effects with your doctor before you start treatment. This will help you to cope better.

## **Radiotherapy**

Radiotherapy uses high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells, while causing as little harm as possible to normal cells. The treatment is given in the radiotherapy department as a series of short daily sessions. Each treatment takes 10–15 minutes and they are usually given Monday–Friday with a rest at the weekend. The healthcare professionals will discuss the treatment with you and shall provide further information.

### ***Side effects of Radiotherapy***

You may develop side effects over the course of your treatment. These usually disappear gradually over a few weeks or months after treatment finishes. The relevant healthcare professional will discuss this with you so you may know what to

expect. Let them know about any side effects you have during or after treatment, as there are often things that can be done to help.

## After your treatment

### **Follow-up**

After your treatment has finished, you will have regular check-ups usually involving a PSA test. These will probably continue for several years. Follow-up appointments are a good opportunity to talk about any concerns you may have. However, if you notice any new symptoms or are anxious about anything else between your appointments, consult with your family doctor (GP). Your GP will guide you accordingly.

### **Sexuality**

Prostate cancer, its treatments and side effects may affect your sex life. Try not to think that sex is never going to be important in your life again. There will often be a period of adjustment for you and your partner. You may feel insecure and worry whether or not your partner will still find you sexually attractive. Partners are often concerned about how to express their love physically and emotionally after treatment. It is ok to be sexually active during treatment but it is always best to discuss this with your doctor.





## **Effects after treatment**

After treatment you may want to get back to your previous lifestyle. However, you may still be coping with the side effects of treatment, such as trouble sleeping or feeling more tired than usual, and even emotional distress. Recovery takes time. It is not unusual to feel anxious and even a bit isolated at this time. People often worry about the cancer coming back and that any ache or pain is a sign that it has returned. It is important to talk over any concerns or questions that you may have with your GP.

## **Lifestyle changes - Making positive decisions**

### **Stop Smoking**

The Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate helps people to stop smoking with one-to-one support through the helpline and organises smoking cessation programs at your Primary Health Centre for your benefit. We advise you to contact the directorate on 23266000/80073333 for further information.

### **Eat well and keep to a healthy weight**

Here are some tips:

- Only eat as much food as you need
- Eat a balanced diet with lots of fruit and vegetables
- Eat less fat and sugar
- Become more physically active
- Regular exercise
- Eat a healthy and balanced diet which contains enough calcium and vitamin D.



## Work

You may need to take time off work during your treatment and for a while afterwards. Your decision is likely to depend mainly on the type of work you do. Getting back into your normal routine can be very helpful and you may want to go back to work as soon as possible. Many people find that going back to work as soon as they feel strong enough gives them a chance to put their worries to one side by becoming involved with their job and colleagues again. It can help to talk to your employer about the situation.

For work related issues or other psychosocial queries you may contact the Social Work Service at the Oncology Centre.

## Reducing stress

There are lots of ways to reduce stress. You could try doing things you enjoy and that make you laugh. Some people find it relaxing to pray or start a new hobby. You may find it helpful to write a journal.





## Useful Resources

Sir Paul Boffa Hospital - A patient information booklet

### **Sir Paul Boffa Hospital Website**

[https://ehealth.gov.mt/healthportal/health\\_institutions/hospital\\_services/boffa\\_hospital/boffa\\_hospital.aspx](https://ehealth.gov.mt/healthportal/health_institutions/hospital_services/boffa_hospital/boffa_hospital.aspx)

### **Mater Dei Hospital Website**

[www.materdeihospital.org.mt/](http://www.materdeihospital.org.mt/)

### **Macmillan Website**

<http://www.macmillan.org.uk/>

#### Thanks

This booklet has been written, revised and edited by the Tailored Information in Cancer Care working group at Sir Anthony Mamo Oncology Centre. Thanks goes to the Macmillan Cancer Support for allowing us to adapt this information to our local needs.

#### Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure that the information we provide is accurate, but it should not be relied upon to reflect the current state of medical research, which is constantly changing. If you are concerned about your health, you should consult your doctor. This booklet does not in any way replace the medical advice or discussion between yourself and the medical team.



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