Treatments for Prostate Cancer
Patient Information Leaflet

Active Monitoring

Some men who are diagnosed with prostate cancer will be advised by their doctors that the best thing to do is to have no immediate treatment.

- No surgery
- No radiotherapy
- No hormone therapy

This seems very odd, but for some men it really is a good option. Typically prostate cancer is slow growing and may never cause problems. Instead of exposing you to the side effects of treatment in those years, the plan is to monitor the cancer actively. Then your doctors can step in later to prevent physical problems arising.

What is Active Monitoring?

While you are being actively monitored, you receive no treatment for your cancer. You will continue to visit your GP regularly and remain in contact with your urologist. You will have your PSA levels regularly tested, which are Prostate-specific antigen (PSA) is a protein made by prostate tissue. Men with prostate cancer often have elevated PSA levels because the cancer cells make excessive amounts of this protein.

You may also have prostate biopsies every couple of years. Your doctor will also monitor your overall health.

If your PSA level starts to go up, then you and your doctor will need to discuss when to start treatment. You may get symptoms that mean you might need to start treatment. These could be problems with passing urine, or pain.

Why be actively monitored?

Many men who have prostate cancer will not have any symptoms for several years. Some men never get any symptoms at all. All active treatments for prostate cancer have common side effects. These could affect you if you choose treatment. If you chose active monitoring you may have many years free of problems from the cancer, and from the side effects of treatment. The major side effects of treatment are impotence and urinary incontinence. It is possible that prostate cancer may not affect your life as much as having treatment would.

The advantage of active monitoring is that, in the short term, you will not have to interrupt your normal life with a hospital stay. In the long term, you will not experience the side effects of treatment. Being actively monitored is a balancing act between the problems of having cancer and the problems of being treated.

Of course, men do have some concerns about being actively monitored rather than being actively treated.
Common questions

Is active monitoring just a way of saving money?

Some men worry that active monitoring is a way of saving the NHS money. Active monitoring is recognised the world over as having a place in treating men with prostate cancer. It is not just a British way of doing things.

Active monitoring is intended to save you from the likely side effects of treatment. If you are an older man you may have other health problems that are more significant. If you need NHS treatment for your prostate cancer in the future, you will get it.

Will I be forgotten?

You will continue to be a man with cancer who will be looked after by your GP and your urologist. You will continue to have appointments with them to talk about your condition. The Prostate Cancer Charity is also here for you to talk to whenever you have worries. We are here for all men with prostate cancer, regardless of the kind of treatment they receive.

Won't my cancer get worse and spread without treatment?

As you are actively monitored, your doctors can tell what is happening to the prostate cancer. If your PSA tests show a steady increase, or a sudden jump, your doctors will know if this is a sign to start treatment. To avoid anxiety you can ask beforehand how high your PSA has to get before your urologist starts treatment.

As your doctor needs your informed consent to start treatment, you should tell them if you are becoming anxious about active monitoring. It is normal for anyone with a diagnosis of cancer to worry about it. Even though your doctors may be confident that the cancer is not a threat to your health, it is natural to wonder “what if?”

If your specialist thinks that there is a significant risk that your cancer might spread, you will not be offered active monitoring as a possible approach.

You may prefer to start treatment if you have become anxious about undergoing no treatment. Discuss this with your urologist. They will understand about this and be sympathetic.

Who is eligible for active monitoring?

Active monitoring is often suggested for older men with prostate cancer that has not spread and is not aggressive. Many older men in their late 70s and 80s have other conditions that are more risk to their health than prostate cancer. Treatment for prostate cancer may make these conditions worse or create other problems.

Some men in their 60s also have such slow growing cancers that it is a good option for them too. It is also possible that treatment for prostate cancer would reduce your quality of life in your last years. Many men die with prostate cancer, but do not die because they have it.
Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of active monitoring with your urologist. Make sure you understand how these relate to you and why your urologist is suggesting the option. Be reassured that this form of monitoring really does have good sense behind it and that it could be the best thing for you.

However, if you are unhappy with it or you become anxious about it you can discuss your other options with your doctor.

Reference
Prostate cancer charity 2008
NICE guidelines

**CONTACT TELEPHONE NUMBERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Telephone numbers</th>
<th>(0191) 4452217 or ring switchboard and ask to bleep 2583</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lorraine Montgomery (Specialist Nurse Practitioner)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urology Secretary Mon- Fri 9.30 – 4pm</td>
<td>(0191) 445 2218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main switchboard</td>
<td>0191 4820000</td>
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</tbody>
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The Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) can provide help, advice and support to patients, relatives or carers who have any questions or concerns regarding their health care. PALS are unable to give medical advice. You can contact PALS on free phone 0800 953 0667. Monday - Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm. An answer phone is available outside of these hours and calls will be returned the next working day.

**Data Protection**

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us improve the services available your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews. Further information is available in the leaflet Disclosure of Confidential Information IL137, via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website or the PALS Service.

*This leaflet can be made available in other languages and formats upon request*