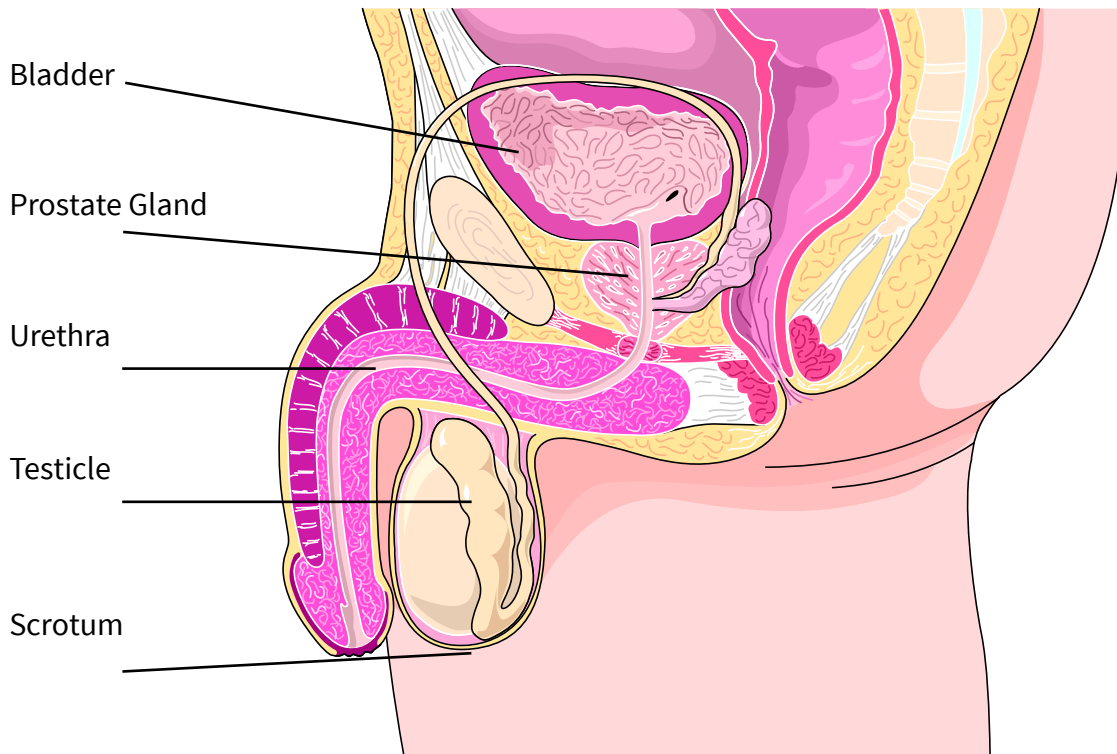


# Hormone Therapy for Prostate Cancer

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## What is prostate cancer?

The prostate is a small gland, about the size of a walnut. It helps make fluid that carries sperm. Benign and cancerous cells can develop in this tissue.



## Things that can raise your risk of prostate cancer:

- being older than 65
- having a family member with prostate cancer
- being of African descent

You can still get prostate cancer even if you don't have these risks.

## What is Testosterone?

Testosterone is a hormone made in the testicles (also called testes).

It helps with:

- growing facial hair
- sexual function and health
- building muscles and strong bones
- making red blood cells

## Hormone Therapy Overview

Prostate cancer cells need testosterone to grow. Hormone therapy lowers testosterone, so cancer cells slow down or die. It does not cure cancer, but it helps control it.

Hormone therapy can be:

- a shot (injection) into skin or muscle
- a pill taken by mouth

Your doctor will talk to you about the best one for you.

## Can testosterone be lowered to help stop the growth of cancer cells?

Yes. Doctors can lower testosterone in two ways:

1. Surgery – removing the testicles (called an orchiectomy).
2. Medicine – taking drugs that stop testosterone or block it from working. This is called hormone therapy.

## Possible Side Effects

You may have side effects during treatment. Some go away after treatment ends. Others may last longer.

Common side effects:

### Feeling tired (fatigue)

- This is the most common side effect. You may need more rest than usual.
- For more information to help you with this side effect, please read the NSH Cancer Care Program patient education resource titled “Managing Cancer-Related Fatigue”:  
<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/nshccp4030>
- Video resource: Cancer-related Fatigue - <https://vimeo.com/showcase/cancereducation>

### Hot flashes

- You might feel a sudden warmth or sweat, even at night. Hot flashes can get better as your body gets used to treatment.
- Let your health care team know if you are bothered by hot flashes, they may be able to provide information about medication that could help.

To manage hot flashes, here are some things you can try:

- drink at least 6 to 8 glasses of water every day.
- avoid alcohol or drinks with caffeine.
- avoid spicy foods.
- consider relaxation breathing, yoga, and acupuncture
- keep your room cool or use a fan.
- lay a towel on top of your bed sheet before you sleep so you can change it easily if you sweat at night.
- wear cotton clothes to keep cool.
- take lukewarm showers or baths instead of hot ones.
- do activities to reduce stress levels.

### **Less interest in sexual activity**

- Many people feel this during and after treatment.
- For more information, please read the NSH Cancer Care Program patient education resource titled “Sexual Health and Prostate Cancer”:  
<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSHCCP4116>

### **Trouble getting or keeping an erection (ED, impotence)**

- There are treatments that can help after therapy ends.
- For more information, please read the NSH Cancer Care Program patient education resource titled “Sexual Health and Prostate Cancer”:  
<https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSHCCP4116>

### **Low testosterone levels**

- Some people’s levels stay low even after stopping treatment. Side effects linked to hormone levels may continue while testosterone levels are low.

### **Weight gain and muscle loss**

- Losing muscle can cause weakness of the arms and legs.
- Diet and exercise help to reduce weight gain and muscle loss.
- Please talk to your cancer care team or primary care provider for advice.

### **Weak bones (osteoporosis)**

- Bones may break more easily. Talk to your primary care physician about ways to keep bones strong, being checked for osteoporosis and steps you can take to prevent losing bone strength including vitamin D, calcium, exercise and quitting smoking.

### **Breast swelling or soreness**

- This can happen during treatment. Some changes may be related to weight gain. Wearing comfortable clothes that are elastic in nature can help to camouflage swollen breasts and provide support.

### **Mood changes**

- You might feel a bigger range of emotions. There are some things you can do to help improve your mood, such as eating healthy, exercising, drinking water, avoiding alcohol and cigarettes, and finding ways to relax.
- Talk to your healthcare team about how you feel; they may suggest a referral to someone who can help you manage your feelings.
- If you would like more information about cancer-related sadness or depression, please read the NSH Cancer Care Program patient education resource titled: “Coping with Cancer-Related Sadness and Depression”: <https://www.nshealth.ca/patient-education-resources/NSHCCP4027>.

**Other body changes**

- You may lose body hair. Hair on the head, face or pubic area is usually not affected.
- You may notice the penis is not as long or a smaller testicle size.

**Higher risk of diabetes**

- Hormone therapy can raise blood sugar and blood fat (lipids) levels. See your primary care physician often to check your weight, blood sugar, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.

**Heart problems**

- The hormone therapy can increase the risk of stroke or heart attack. This risk is higher if you have had these issues in the past. It is important that you try to minimize any weight gain, stay active, and limit or removing other risks factors including smoking and alcohol use.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the information in this educational pamphlet, please discuss them with your cancer care team at your next appointment.

**Patient and family feedback is very important to us.**

**We would like to invite you to send any comments or suggestions on how to improve this booklet to [education.cancercare@nshealth.ca](mailto:education.cancercare@nshealth.ca) or feel free to call us at 1-866-599-2267.**

**Looking for more health information?**

Find this brochure and all our patient resources here: <http://library.nshealth.ca/cancer>

Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.

For more information, go to <http://library.novascotia.ca>

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