

Rectal Exam or Blood Test: Which Is the First Step to Prostate Cancer Screening?

American Cancer Society survey finds misconceptions about prostate cancer screening. Plus: Watch an awareness campaign launched with Alonzo Mourning.

September 17, 2024 By American Cancer Society

This year, according to the [American Cancer Society](#), an estimated 299,010 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in the U.S. and 35,250 men will die from the disease. What's more, the incidence of prostate cancer is about [70% higher](#) in Black men than White men. However, nearly [two-thirds](#) of men aged 55–69 report that they are not being screened for prostate cancer. As a result, the rate of advanced stage prostate cancer diagnoses has [increased](#) after decades of decline.

For Prostate Cancer Awareness Month, the American Cancer Society is releasing the results of a new survey conducted by The Harris Poll of nearly 1,200 men ages 45 and older across the U.S.*, shedding light on the current state of awareness regarding prostate cancer and screening guidelines. Key findings from the survey include:

- Three in five men (60%) mistakenly believed that the first step to prostate cancer screening is a rectal exam performed by a healthcare provider.
 - Hispanic men (69%) were more likely than White men (58%) to mistakenly believe the first step to prostate cancer screening is a rectal exam.
- Among men who had not spoken with a health care provider about getting screened for prostate cancer, nearly half (49%) would be more likely to talk to a health care provider if they knew the first step was a blood test.

- Among men who had not been screened, the number one reason they gave was that they don't think they need to be screened for prostate cancer yet (37%).
- Two in five U.S. men (38%) did not know that family history of prostate cancer influences eligibility for prostate cancer screening.
 - Black men (72%) had a significantly greater acknowledgement of the impact of family history than Hispanic (56%) or White men (61%).
- One in four Hispanic men (25%) and one in four Black men (25%) were unsure or mistakenly believed they don't need to be screened for prostate cancer unless they experience potential signs/symptoms of the disease.
- Over half of men (56%) didn't know that erectile dysfunction can be a sign of prostate cancer.

The American Cancer Society recommends that men begin discussions with their health care provider about prostate cancer screening as early as age 40, depending on their risk level. Prostate cancer screening is designed to catch the disease early before signs or symptoms develop. For men who want to be screened, the [first step](#) typically involves a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test, resulting in a PSA score. All men considering undergoing screening should have a life expectancy of at least 10 more years.

Discussion about [prostate cancer screening](#) should take place at:

- Age 50 for men who are at average risk of prostate cancer.
- Age 45 for men at high risk of developing prostate cancer. This includes African-American men and men who have a first-degree relative (father or brother) diagnosed with prostate cancer at an early age (younger than age 65).
- Age 40 for men at even higher risk (those with more than one first-degree relative who had

prostate cancer at an early age).

“What’s most concerning is that while prostate cancer is highly survivable, it’s still the second leading cause of cancer death in men,” said [Dr. Karen E. Knudsen](#), CEO for the American Cancer Society and [ACS Cancer Action Network](#). “This is because once prostate cancer advances and spreads beyond the prostate, it becomes much more difficult to treat, and survival rates significantly decrease. This survey shows that there is still a gap in understanding prostate cancer screening recommendations, which suggests discussions with health care providers are not taking place. By educating men on the importance of early detection and prevention strategies, for those who choose to undergo regular screening, we have the ability to save lives and reverse the increase in late-stage prostate cancer diagnoses.”

To educate men about the importance of prostate screening, the American Cancer Society is launching the ‘[Know Your Score](#)’ campaign with prostate cancer survivor and former NBA star Alonzo Mourning as part of Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. Through this campaign, ACS aims to encourage men to have proactive conversations with their health care providers. By learning their PSA score and working closely with their doctor, men who are diagnosed can then make informed decisions about treatment. Knowing the score shouldn’t end when the game does. Knowing your PSA score is part of a game-winning and lifesaving strategy.

Visit cancer.org/getscreened to learn more and find a screening location near you.

*This survey was conducted online within the United States by The Harris Poll on behalf of the American Cancer Society from August 15–19 and 20–22, 2024 among 1,197 men ages 45 and older. The sampling precision of Harris online polls is measured by using a Bayesian credible interval. For this study, the total sample data is accurate to within + 3.3 percentage points using a 95% confidence level. For complete survey methodology, including weighting variables and subgroup sample sizes, please contact the American Cancer Society.

[This press release](#) was originally published September 5, 2024, by the American Cancer Society. It is republished with permission.