

THE UROLOGY GROUP

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ACTIVE SURVEILLANCE FOR LOCALIZED PROSTATE CANCER

Localized Prostate Cancer

There are three usual ways to manage prostate cancer contained in the prostate gland, or localized prostate cancer. These treatments are **active surveillance** (also known as watchful waiting), **radiation therapy** and **surgery**. There is no information that shows one treatment is clearly better than the others. In men with aggressive cancer, the chance that the tumor will return is high even with any one of these treatments.

Active surveillance or watchful waiting, is based on the fact that some prostate cancers may never become life threatening. With these approaches, the PSA blood test and a digital rectal exam are checked and prostate biopsies may be done on a regular basis. Other treatments can be started at any time if the cancer shows signs of growth or of becoming a more aggressive tumor. For watchful waiting and active surveillance, the timing of check-ups and visits to the doctor will be different for each man with prostate cancer.

Watchful Waiting/Active Surveillance

Managing localized prostate cancer with regular exams but no treatment has two main **advantages** – a low cost and no immediate complications. Watchful waiting may be a personal choice or a choice because a man has a shorter life expectancy and wants to avoid possible problems with treatment. Active surveillance may be a good choice for a man with a longer life expectancy and a low-risk tumor. These men usually have a lower Gleason score, PSA level and clinical stage. Medical studies show that a man with localized, low-grade prostate cancer has a lower chance of the tumor growing within the first 10 years after it has been found.

The main **disadvantage** of watchful waiting and active surveillance is that over time the cancer could become worse and even untreatable. The signs of cancer getting worse and the exact time to start treatment are not always known. If the cancer spreads outside the prostate during the time between check-ups, there is a good chance that it may not be able to be cured. When prostate cancer spreads, it often spreads into the bones. This is painful and can prevent a man from participating in his normal daily activities and affect his quality of life before he dies.

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Reference: The Management of Localized Prostate Cancer: Patient Guide. Copyright 2008 American Urological Association Foundation. <http://www.auanet.org/content/media/pc08.pdf>