**Men’s health** - When should I get my first PSA test?

What exactly is a PSA test and why should men have it done?

PSA is a protein that is produced by the prostate, and stands for Prostate Specific Antigen. The prostate is a small gland situated below the bladder and above the rectum, and produces seminal fluid that helps carry sperm during ejaculation.

A PSA test measures the amount of PSA in the blood, and is often used as an indicator for the presence of prostate cancer. An elevated PSA level is considered to be 4.0 ng/mL or higher. It is important to note that an elevated PSA does not always indicate the presence of cancer, but can be indicative of other benign conditions, e.g. benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), prostate infections and trauma. Only 30% of men with elevated PSA levels have prostate cancer. Prostate screening, therefore, should not consist of a PSA test alone, but should be accompanied by a digital rectal examination by a healthcare professional.

Having a PSA test is crucial for the early detection of prostate cancer, as it can then be treated more easily and effectively if detected at an early stage. Unfortunately, this test is not a 100% accurate, and false negative as well as false positive results have occurred. If a person should test positive, the result should not be ignored, and further investigations need to take place (ultrasounds and biopsies).

The risk of developing prostate cancer does increase with age, rarely being detected in men younger than 50 years of age. Men with relatives (a father or brother) who have been diagnosed with prostate cancer, are at higher risk and more likely to develop prostate cancer.

In general, it is agreed that men who do choose to go for prostate cancer screening, should start doing so at the age of 50, having it checked every year thereafter. Men with risk factors for prostate cancer should consider screening from the age of 45 years. Men over the age of 75 years are generally not screened, as these men are unlikely to benefit from screening and/or treatment.