BETWEEN VISITS

PSA and the rectal exam

Research summary for a primary-care conversation

86%

In PROBASE, **86% of prostate cancers detected through PSA screening** had a digital rectal exam without a suspicious finding. The trial enrolled men at age 45 in Germany.

What the research found

A normal-feeling rectal exam can miss prostate cancer. A 2024 review of eight prospective studies also found that PSA screening detected more prostate cancers than a rectal exam alone. The 86% figure describes the PSA-detected cases in PROBASE.

What a PSA result means

PSA is a protein made by the prostate. The blood test reports it in ng/mL. Cancer, enlargement and inflammation of the prostate can raise PSA. Bring previous results and a list of medicines. Your clinician may repeat a newly elevated result before deciding whether more tests would help.

Deciding whether to screen

Discuss age, family history, ancestry, general health and preferences. Screening may find important cancers earlier. It can also lead to false alarms or to finding slow-growing cancers that would never cause harm.

A question to bring

Given my personal risk and any previous results, would a PSA test add information after a normal rectal exam?

Research and guidance

Krilaviciute et al. PROBASE trial analysis. Eur Urol Oncol, 2023.

Matsukawa et al. DRE and PSA systematic review. Eur Urol Oncol, 2024.

Canadian Urological Association. Prostate cancer early detection guidance, 2022.

U.S. National Cancer Institute. Prostate-Specific Antigen (PSA) Test.

Clinically reviewed by Dr. Eduardo Jacques | 22 November 2026

Sources checked 22 November 2026