

Prostate cancer treatment options: surveillance, surgery, radiation

The right prostate cancer plan depends on how likely the cancer is to grow or spread, your overall health and expected lifespan, and your personal goals. Active surveillance, surgery, radiation, focal therapy and observation offer different benefits and trade-offs, and no choice fits every man.



Figure 22.1. The Prostate Cancer Decision Balance. Decisions balance tumor risk, health, life expectancy, functional priorities, and treatment burdens. Active surveillance retains the intention to cure if risk changes. Watchful waiting focuses on symptoms when curative treatment is not expected to benefit the patient. Systemic treatment is a distinct pathway selected according to stage and risk.

Key points

- The word cancer is the same; the biology is not. Grade Group, PSA, stage, biopsy findings and scans define risk.
- Active surveillance is an active program with planned checks, and treatment remains available if risk changes.
- Watchful waiting is different: it focuses on symptoms when curative treatment is unlikely to help.
- Surgery and radiation can each control appropriately selected localized cancer, with different side-effect profiles.
- Focal therapy may suit carefully selected men, but it is not a risk-free middle ground.
- Judge side effects against how you function now, and plan beyond the first treatment.

Questions to ask your urologist

- What is my cancer's risk category, and what is its expected course?
- Is active surveillance reasonable for me, and if so, who runs it and what would trigger treatment?
- Which surveillance, surgical, radiation, focal and systemic options fit my situation?
- How could each option affect urination, erections, bowel function and recovery, given how I function now?

- How would this first treatment shape my options if the cancer returned?
- Should I hear from a radiation oncologist or another specialist before deciding?

Find a urologist near you: [localurology.com](https://www.localurology.com) · Adapted from *A Urology Consult in a Book* by David Shusterman, MD, board-certified urologist. General information, not medical advice. Talk with your own doctor about your situation.