

Detecting Prostate Cancer Earlier

WHAT IS THE PROSTATE: The prostate is a walnut-sized gland, located between the bladder and the penis and in front of the rectum. Its primary function is the production of seminal fluid, the milky substance that nourishes sperm. A new blood test is more reliable at finding prostate cancer in its early stages by detecting a protein marker in blood plasma. Doctors say the new test, now in clinical trials, will have an accuracy of 95 percent, better than the commonly used PSA, which signals abnormal prostate conditions rather than cancer.

Cancer biologists now have a new blood test, currently in clinical trials, that's more reliable and accurate at finding the disease in its earliest stages. The new test identifies a protein marker in blood plasma, called early prostate cancer antigen -- or EPCA. When the marker appears in a blood test, it indicates a high probability of living with cancer, not just that something is wrong. Doctors say it's the best indicator yet of prostate cancer.

"If you have the EPCA marker in your blood, you almost certainly, higher than 95-percent chance, have prostate cancer," Robert Getzenberg, a cancer biologist at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, says -- promising new number that might help reduce the amount of prostate biopsies, a painful, invasive procedure to confirm cancer, and focus on men who are truly at risk.