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## Prostate screening has no benefit

By James Gallagher Health reporter, BBC News



Radiotherapy is used to treat prostate cancer

Prostate cancer screening does not save lives, according to a 20-year study, published in the [British Medical Journal](#).

One in four newly diagnosed cancers in UK men is prostate cancer.

Last year, the body which regulates screening in the UK advised against routine screening.

The UK National Screening Committee said this study provided further evidence that the harms outweigh the benefits.

Prostate cancer kills 10,000 people in the UK every year.

While there is no screening programme, men over 50 may still request a test.

### Screening

This latest study was carried out in Norrköping in Sweden. It followed 9,026 men who were in their 50s or 60s in 1987.

"The potential harms significantly outweigh the benefits of screening"

Dr Anne Mackie UK National Screening Committee

Nearly 1,500 men were randomly chosen to be screened every three years between 1987 and 1996. The first two tests were performed by digital rectal examination and then by prostate specific antigen testing.

The report concludes: "After 20 years of follow-up, the rate of death from prostate cancer did not differ significantly between men in the screening group and those in the control group."

The favoured method of screening is the prostate specific antigen (PSA) test.

However, around 15% of men with normal PSA levels will have prostate cancer

and two-thirds of men with high levels of PSA do not in fact have prostate cancer.

One study has suggested that to prevent one death from prostate cancer you would have to screen 1,410 men and treat 48 of them.

Dr Anne Mackie, programmes director of the UK National Screening Committee, said: "This evidence provides further support for the recommendation the Committee made in November not to screen for prostate cancer at this time.

"At the moment the potential harms significantly outweigh the benefits of screening. We will re-assess the evidence for prostate cancer screening against our criteria again in three years, or earlier if new evidence warrants it."

Dr Sarah Cant, head of policy and campaigns for The Prostate Cancer Charity, said: "Whilst this research suggests that screening men for prostate cancer doesn't reduce the number of men dying from the disease, this was a relatively small study and not all the screening rounds used the PSA test, which is the most effective test we have at the moment to indicate prostate problems that might be cancer.

"We know from another larger study that screening using the PSA test can reduce mortality rates.

"However, this previous trial showed that screening can lead to many men undergoing unnecessary treatment for a harmless prostate cancer. The Prostate Cancer Charity therefore doesn't believe there is enough evidence yet to support a screening programme."