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Tests, imaging and biomarkers to diagnose or monitor prostate cancer

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Summary in 5 points:

1. The importance of the role of PSA in the management of your cancer

Along with active surveillance, whether it's surgery, radiation therapy, or hormone therapy, your PSA levels should drop and stabilize. Subsequently, if blood tests repeatedly show a significant increase in your PSA level, such results will most likely indicate a recurrence of the disease which may require further treatment.

2. Abdominal and pelvic scan or computed tomography scan (CT-Scan)

More often used before radiation therapy to find out the exact dimensions of your prostate, this imaging test uses X-rays beamed at different angles to create 3D images of your organs. It allows your doctor to see if the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes or other organs such as the liver or lungs.

3. Magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) in the search of clinically significant cancer

Used before a biopsy, during or after treatment, MRI uses powerful magnets and radio waves to produce 3D images of organs, tissues, bones and blood to measure tumor size and to look for signs indicating that the cancer has spread. MRI produces clearer images than abdominal and pelvic scans.

4. Bone scan

This technique, which uses a small amount of radiation, allows your doctor to see if the cancer has spread to the bones. You might have this test if you have bone pain, if your cancer is aggressive at diagnosis, or if your doctor thinks the cancer has spread outside of your prostate.

5. Classic positron emission tomography (PET) scan vs PSMA* PET-scan

If the classic PET-scan is widely used to diagnose cancers, it is less useful for prostate cancer, the injected product, a glucose derivative as a tracer, being poorly absorbed by prostate cancer cells. In this case, the PSMA PET-scan uses a radioactive product that targets PSMA – a protein – to locate cancerous cells of prostate origin. This technique is becoming more accessible, but you usually have to participate in a clinical study to be able to take advantage of it.

*PSMA: Prostate-specific membrane antigen