

# Fatigue and prostate cancer



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This fact sheet is for anyone who has prostate cancer or has had treatment for prostate cancer and wants to know more about fatigue (extreme tiredness). Your partner, family or friends might also find it helpful.

We explain the possible causes of fatigue and how it may affect your energy levels, thoughts, feelings, relationships and activities. We also suggest ways to manage your fatigue and include other sources of information and support.

### Symbols

These symbols appear in this fact sheet to guide you to more information:



Speak to our Specialist Nurses



Read our publications

### Support with your fatigue

Our Specialist Nurses can give you information and ongoing support for your fatigue over the phone. Speak to them, in confidence, on **0800 074 8383**.

### Our 'How to manage fatigue' online guide

Our interactive guide gives you practical ways to help manage your fatigue including quizzes, trackers to fill in and tips from other men. Visit [prostatecanceruk.org/guides](http://prostatecanceruk.org/guides)

## What is fatigue?

Fatigue is a feeling of extreme tiredness. It's different from normal tiredness, which might affect you if you've worked hard, exercised, or not had enough sleep. Normal tiredness usually gets better once you've rested. But fatigue often doesn't go away, even after you rest.

Fatigue is very common in men with prostate cancer. Around three in four men with prostate cancer (74 per cent) will have fatigue at some point. There is support available and things you can do to help manage your fatigue and give you more energy.



## How might fatigue make me feel?

Fatigue can affect you physically and emotionally. You might use some of these words to describe how fatigue makes you feel:

**tired exhausted weak lethargic  
drained knackered shattered beat  
weary spent weighed down  
drowsy whacked done in**

Fatigue can make it hard to carry out daily activities, including:

- everyday tasks, such as getting dressed, having a shower or making yourself food
- social activities, such as seeing friends and family
- hobbies and interests you usually enjoy
- sleeping (insomnia)
- concentrating
- remembering things.

Fatigue can also affect your concentration, making it hard to understand new information about your cancer or make decisions about your treatment. Talk to your doctor or nurse and take time to make sure you have all the information you need before making any big decisions.

Fatigue can come on suddenly and leave you feeling very tired, without warning. This means you need to be very careful in certain situations – for example, when you are driving or working with machinery. In these situations, it's best to stop what you are doing and take a break, or ask someone else to take over.

Fatigue can affect your mood. It might make you feel upset, depressed, or anxious. And you may feel guilty or frustrated that you can't do the things you normally do.

It can also affect your relationships. You may start to depend more on others. You might feel unable to go to work or see friends and family as much as usual. This can make you feel lonely or isolated. Fatigue can also affect your sex life, as you may not have enough energy for sex.

Many men are surprised by how much fatigue impacts their lives. Some say fatigue is one of the hardest parts of having prostate cancer. But everyone's experience is different. You might have some or all of these effects of fatigue. And the way it affects you might change over time.



**Fatigue hits me at random times.  
I feel okay and then all of a sudden I have a bad day.  
I found it difficult to adjust to.**

*A personal experience*

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## Why might I get fatigue?

We don't know exactly why men with prostate cancer get fatigue. It's likely that lots of different things are involved, including the following.

- **Prostate cancer itself.** Cancer can stop the normal cells in your body from working properly. This can change the way your body uses energy and can cause fatigue.
- **Treatments for prostate cancer.** All treatments for prostate cancer can cause fatigue. Your fatigue is likely to be worse if you have hormone therapy, radiotherapy or chemotherapy, or more than one treatment at the same time.
- **Stress, anxiety or depression.** Feeling stressed, anxious or depressed about your diagnosis or treatment can cause fatigue.
- **Travelling to appointments.** Travelling to the hospital or GP surgery for treatments and check-ups can be tiring – especially if you are experiencing fatigue.
- **Symptoms of advanced prostate cancer.** Some symptoms of advanced prostate cancer, such as pain or anaemia, can cause fatigue.

- **Pain.** Pain caused by your cancer, treatment or another health problem can make your fatigue worse.
- **Medicines.** Some medicines can also cause fatigue. Speak to your doctor about changing your medicines – this could help improve your fatigue.
- **Other health problems.** Some other health problems, such as kidney disease or arthritis, can cause fatigue.
- **Poor sleep.** Not sleeping well at night can make your fatigue worse. And having fatigue can make it harder to sleep well. You might wake up in the night because of symptoms of prostate cancer or side effects from your treatment, such as having a hot flush or needing to urinate (wee).
- **Lack of physical activity.** Being inactive can make your fatigue worse. It can also make it harder to sleep properly at night.
- **Other things that use up energy.** Going to work, caring for other people, or meeting up with friends or family may make your fatigue worse. You may be able to make small lifestyle changes to give you more energy.

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## How long will my fatigue last?

How long fatigue lasts varies from person to person and depends on many things, including:

- the cause of your fatigue
- the type of treatment you've had
- how long your treatment lasts.

It may get better or worse over time. Fatigue caused by your treatment may improve when you finish treatment. But some men have fatigue for months, or sometimes years. And life-long treatment can cause long-term fatigue.

## Surgery (radical prostatectomy)

Some men get fatigue for a few weeks or months after surgery. For most men, energy levels are better six to eight weeks after surgery. But others have fatigue for longer.

## Radiotherapy

Most men having external beam radiotherapy or brachytherapy experience fatigue. For some, fatigue gets worse over time. It usually improves a few weeks after treatment ends. But it can take up to a year to get better.

## Hormone therapy

For some men on hormone therapy, fatigue gets better over time. For others, it gets worse. If you're on long-term hormone therapy and find your fatigue difficult to deal with, you may be able to have a break from treatment if tests suggest the cancer isn't growing. This is called intermittent hormone therapy. This can improve your fatigue, but it can take several months. And some men never notice any improvement.

## Chemotherapy

Chemotherapy is usually given every three weeks for six to ten sessions. During a course of chemotherapy, your energy levels may go up and down. Fatigue is usually worse during the week after each treatment session but then gradually improves. It is also common for fatigue to get worse, the more sessions you have.

After finishing a course of chemotherapy, most men find their energy levels improve. But for some, fatigue can be long-lasting.

## High-intensity focused ultrasound (HIFU) and cryotherapy

These treatments can both cause fatigue but we don't know how long it might last for. This is because they are less common than other treatments for prostate cancer.

## How can I manage fatigue?

Lots of things can cause fatigue, so there is no one thing that can get rid of it completely. But there are lots of things that can help. Small changes to your life can make a big difference.

### Ask for help

Asking for help can be difficult if you're used to being independent. Partners, family and friends usually want to help, but won't know what you need. Try to think about what activities you want to do for yourself, and let other people know what you would like them to help you with.

### Talk to your doctor or nurse

It's important to talk to your healthcare team if you think you have fatigue. They can help you understand what might be making your fatigue worse and help you find ways to manage it.

For example, if you can't drive to your medical appointments because of your fatigue, the hospital may provide free transport for you.



Our Specialist Nurses can talk to you about your experience of fatigue, and discuss ways to better manage it. Speak to them on 0800 074 8383.

### Get help with emotional problems

Fatigue can affect your energy levels, mood and emotions. This can affect your sleep and make your fatigue worse. If you feel down or anxious, talking to someone or getting support can help. It may help to speak to your GP – they can check if you have depression or anxiety and suggest things that may help.

### Plan ahead and take things slowly

You might not have enough energy to do everything you used to do. And you may need to do some things a little differently. But if you plan ahead, you can try to do the things that are most important to you.

Keeping a diary can help you plan your activities. You can download our fatigue diary at [prostatecanceruk.org/tired](http://prostatecanceruk.org/tired). Some men find thinking about 'the five Ps' helpful when planning their time.

### The five Ps

#### Plan

Write a list of all the things you have to do.

#### Prioritise

Work out what's most important to you each day and put that at the top of your list.

#### Pace

Allow extra time to get things done. Stop before you get too tired.

#### Permission

Give yourself permission to do things differently and take things easy for a while.

#### Position

Make the task easier. You could sit down instead of standing if it's more comfortable.

### Make time to relax

Taking time to relax is really important. It can help with the stress of having cancer treatment and with fatigue. Try to prioritise some time every day for the things you enjoy doing and make you feel relaxed. This could be meditating, breathing exercises, painting, or listening to music or a podcast. The Mental Health Foundation have a number of relaxation exercises that you can follow. Visit [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk) to find out more.

### Eat and drink well

A healthy diet can boost your energy levels. If you find it hard to eat healthily, ask your doctor to refer you to a dietitian. If you are too tired to make yourself a meal, a friend or family member might be able to help. Or you could order healthy, cooked meals to be delivered to your home from your local authority or a private company. Find out more at [prostatecanceruk.org/tired](http://prostatecanceruk.org/tired)

Drinking plenty of fluids can improve your energy levels. Try to drink around 1.5 to 2 litres (3 to 4 pints) of water a day – or a little more in hot weather or if you're physically active. If you often get up at night to urinate, you may worry about

drinking lots of water. But this can help to prevent bladder irritation, meaning you may not need to urinate so often and may sleep better. However, it might help to drink less in the two hours before you go to bed. Try to avoid fizzy drinks, alcohol, and drinks that contain caffeine (such as tea, coffee and cola), as these can irritate your bladder so that you urinate more often.

### Keep active

If you don't have much energy, it can be hard to keep active. But taking up regular physical activity during and after your treatment can help to reduce fatigue.

It can improve your:

- energy levels
- sleep
- appetite
- general health
- mood
- muscle and bone strength
- weight
- sex drive (libido).

### How to get started with physical activity

Lots of people find it hard to be more active. You might be worried that you're not fit enough to start doing exercise. Or you might feel frustrated that you're not as fit as you used to be. Some treatments for prostate cancer can cause urinary incontinence, so some men worry about leaking urine when they exercise. You might also be worried about hurting yourself. If you are worried about any of these things, speak to your doctor, nurse or physiotherapist.



**Exercise might be the last thing you feel like doing when you have fatigue, but it can make a difference.**

*A personal experience*

Doing any amount of activity is better than none. Do what you can and build up slowly. We've included some ideas below. You can also

speaking to your doctor, nurse or a physiotherapist. They can give you advice on the best type of activity for you.

Light to moderate exercise can make you feel more awake. You could try:

- standing up and sitting down
- walking to the shops
- climbing stairs
- cycling
- fixing things around the house
- gardening
- housework, like cleaning or vacuuming
- washing the car
- swimming.

It may be even more effective if you do light to moderate exercise along with strength or resistance training, such as lifting light weights or using elastic resistance bands.

You can even exercise from your chair or bed. Try lifting your arms and legs or bending and straightening them. This can help improve your movement and muscle strength.

If you're on hormone therapy or have cancer that has spread to the bones, you may have weakened bones. This can increase your risk of broken bones (fractures). So it's important to speak to your doctor, nurse or a physiotherapist before you start a new activity or increase the amount of physical activity you do. They can talk to you about exercising safely.

### Exercise referral schemes

These are special exercise programmes for people with health problems, including prostate cancer and fatigue. They're run by health professionals or fitness trainers who have experience of working with people who have health problems. Ask your GP about schemes in your area.

### Walking

Walking can reduce fatigue in men with prostate cancer. Joining a walking group can be an enjoyable and sociable way to start doing gentle physical activity. Find walks and walking groups at [prostatecanceruk.org/tired](https://prostatecanceruk.org/tired)





## My local walking club helped keep me fit and make new friends.

A personal experience

### Finding places to exercise

You might prefer to use a gym, go to a swimming pool or join an exercise class. And if the weather is bad, it might be helpful to walk in an indoor shopping centre. Find somewhere to exercise near you at [prostatecanceruk.org/tired](https://prostatecanceruk.org/tired)



Read more about healthy eating and physical activity in our fact sheet, **Diet and physical activity for men with prostate cancer**.

### Improve your sleep

Although fatigue doesn't always get better when you rest, sleeping well can often help. The following tips may help you get a proper rest at night.

#### During the day

- Do some physical activity. Regular physical activity can help you sleep better.
- Try to stick to a routine so your body gets used to going to bed and getting up at the same time every day.
- Avoid sleeping during the day if you can – try a relaxing activity or resting instead. If you do need to sleep during the day, try a short afternoon nap for up to 30 minutes. It's best not to do this after 3pm, so you can still sleep at night.

#### Before you go to sleep

- Feeling hungry can disturb your sleep. You could have a bedtime snack, like a banana.
- Have fewer drinks, including water, in the evening, so you don't wake up to urinate as often. Make sure you still drink plenty of water during the day.

- Avoid watching TV or using electronic devices such as a computer, tablet or mobile phone for at least 30 minutes before you go to bed.
- Keep a worry book. If you can't get to sleep because you're worrying about something, write it down. Look at your worries during the day and ask your family, friends and medical team if they can help you sort them out.

### Prepare your bedroom

- Make sure there isn't too much light in your bedroom. An eye mask and dark blinds or curtains might help.
- Make your bedroom as quiet as possible. You could try using ear plugs.
- Make your bedroom a comfortable temperature. This can be particularly important if you have hot flushes that wake you up at night.

If you're still having trouble sleeping, speak to your GP. They may sometimes prescribe a course of sleeping pills to help you get some rest.

### Complementary therapies

Complementary therapies may help to relieve some of your symptoms. Many of them have not been tested in clinical trials so you won't receive them as standard medical treatment. Some people use them alongside medical treatment. Small studies have found that yoga, acupuncture, meditation and massage can improve fatigue in people who have cancer. Some complementary therapies may have side effects or interfere with your cancer treatment. So make sure your doctor or nurse knows about any complementary therapies you're using or thinking of trying. And make sure that any complementary therapist you see knows about your cancer and treatments.

Some complementary therapies are available through hospices, GPs and hospitals. But if you want to find a therapist yourself, make sure they are properly qualified and belong to a professional body. You can get advice on

finding a properly qualified therapist from the Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council.

Macmillan Cancer Support and Cancer Research UK have more information about different therapies and important safety issues to think about when choosing a therapy.

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## Dealing with fatigue at work

If you're living with or after prostate cancer, continuing to work can be an important way of getting back to normal life. But not everyone is able to keep working, and some may decide to work part-time or take early retirement.

### Your rights at work

There are laws that protect anyone who has, or has had, cancer. Even if you no longer have cancer, you are still protected against discrimination.

In England, Scotland or Wales, the Equality Act protects your rights. In Northern Ireland the Disability Discrimination Act protects your rights. Under these laws your employer has a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to where and how you work, to make sure you get the same chances as the people you work with. For example, a reasonable adjustment could be:

- giving you time off to go to medical appointments
- allowing extra breaks if you feel tired
- changing your job description to remove tasks that cause you problems
- providing suitable toilet facilities.

You can find out more about your rights at work during and after cancer treatment from Macmillan Cancer Support.

### What else can help?

If your employer learns more about prostate cancer and fatigue, they might be more understanding. If you don't feel like talking about it, perhaps you could give them this fact sheet to read.

Take a look at your company policies and employee handbook. Talk to your occupational health service for advice.

Go to your employer with suggestions about what would help you. For example, taking extra breaks, working from home, flexible hours, or changing your job role or duties for a while. Know your legal rights. Find out more about the law and make sure your boss or company is aware of it. Contact your union if you're part of one. Your local Citizens Advice can also help. If you're self-employed or looking for work, you can get more specific information from Macmillan Cancer Support or Disability Rights UK.

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## Fatigue and relationships

Prostate cancer can change the normal pattern of your life, and affect relationships, friendships and roles within your family. It can bring challenges, but can also bring some couples and families closer together.

If you have fatigue, you might feel too tired to look after yourself. You might become more dependent on your partner, family or friends. This can feel frustrating. You might feel guilty or embarrassed that you can't do as much as you used to. This can put stress on your relationships. You might find it helpful to:

- learn more about fatigue together
- talk about how you feel
- get support as a family
- get help with practical matters such as work, money or household tasks
- develop a wider support network including other family members or friends.

Try to make time for family activities when you have more energy. You may not feel up to some activities that you've done in the past. But it could be a chance to try something new.

### Fatigue and sex

You may not have enough energy for sex. Try to plan your day to make the most of when you have more energy. Having sex in a position where you don't have to move around much, and taking breaks may help. Being



physically close by hugging and holding each other can help you stay close when you don't feel like having sex. Read more about sex and relationships in our booklet, **Prostate cancer and your sex life**.

## Where can I get more support?

Fatigue can feel overwhelming and frustrating. Many people who experience fatigue find that others may not understand how difficult it is. It's important to know that you are not alone. There are healthcare professionals, family, friends and services that can help.

### Your medical team

It can be useful to speak to someone in your medical team about your fatigue, even if they don't ask about it. They might look at the causes of your fatigue and suggest some things that could help. They may refer you to an exercise programme, or to one of the following specialists for support.

- A counsellor or clinical psychologist can help you deal with the emotional side effects of fatigue and prostate cancer. They can help you find your own ways to deal with things.
- Occupational therapists provide advice and access to equipment to help with daily life, such as bathing or using the stairs.
- Physiotherapists advise on exercises to help improve mobility and fitness.

### Prostate Cancer UK services

We have a range of services to help you deal with problems caused by prostate cancer or its treatments, including:



- **our Specialist Nurses**, who can help with any questions in confidence
- **our one-to-one support service**, where you can speak to someone who understands what you're going through
- **our online community**, a place to ask questions or share experiences.



To find out more about any of the above, visit **prostatecanceruk.org/get-support** or call our Specialist Nurses on **0800 074 8383**.

### Supporting someone with fatigue

Supporting a partner, friend or family member with fatigue can be very difficult. The following things might help.

- Ask your loved one what they feel able to do and support them to do those things.
- Ask what they don't feel able to do and look into ways you or other people could help with those things.
- Ask if your loved one would like you to go to hospital appointments with them.
- Learn more about fatigue so you understand what your loved one is going through.
- Be prepared for changes in your loved one's behaviour. You might feel frustrated or upset about your loved one's fatigue. Look for ways to process and deal with these feelings.
- Make sure you get enough rest so that you have enough energy to support your loved one.
- Ask friends and family for help.
- Ask your GP or your loved one's medical team for support.



Read more about how you can support someone with prostate cancer, and look after yourself, in our booklet, **When you're close to someone with prostate cancer: A guide for partners and family**.



# Questions to ask your doctor or nurse



You may find it helpful to keep a note of any questions you have to take to your next appointment.

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Is my prostate cancer treatment likely to cause fatigue?

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How long might my fatigue last?

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What can I do to improve or manage my fatigue?

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What physical activity is suitable for me? How can I access a local exercise programme?

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Is there a local support group for men with prostate cancer-related fatigue?

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What other support is available to me?

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Who can I speak to for advice about work?

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## More information

### Cancer Research UK

[www.cancerresearchuk.org](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org)

Telephone: 0808 800 4040

Information about prostate cancer and clinical trials.

### Citizens Advice

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

Telephone: 0800 144 8848 (England)

0800 702 2020 (Wales)

Advice on a range of issues including financial and legal matters. Find your nearest Citizens Advice in the phonebook or online.

### Citizens Advice Scotland

[www.cas.org.uk](http://www.cas.org.uk)

Telephone: 0800 028 1456

Advice on a range of issues including employment, housing, debt, benefits and bills.

### Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council

[www.cnhc.org.uk](http://www.cnhc.org.uk)

Telephone: 020 3668 0406

Details of complementary therapists who meet national standards.

### Disability Rights UK

[www.disabilityrightsuk.org](http://www.disabilityrightsuk.org)

Telephone: 0330 995 0400

Practical information about disability rights and benefits, and keys for accessible toilets across the UK.

### Macmillan Cancer Support

[www.macmillan.org.uk](http://www.macmillan.org.uk)

Telephone: 0808 808 0000

Practical, financial and emotional support for people with cancer, their family and friends.

### Maggie's

[www.maggies.org](http://www.maggies.org)

Telephone: 0300 123 1801

Drop-in centres for cancer information and support, and online support groups.

### Mental Health Foundation

[www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

Information about mental health, including resources and advice on how to look after your mental health.

### NHS websites

England: [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

Scotland: [www.nhsinform.scot](http://www.nhsinform.scot)

Wales: [www.111.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.111.wales.nhs.uk)

Information about conditions, treatments and lifestyle. Support for carers and a directory of health services in England, Scotland and Wales.

### nidirect (Northern Ireland)

[www.nidirect.gov.uk](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk)

Information about government services in Northern Ireland, including health services.

### Penny Brohn UK

[www.pennybrohn.org.uk](http://www.pennybrohn.org.uk)

Telephone: 0303 3000 118

Courses and physical, emotional and spiritual support for people with cancer and their loved ones.

## About us

Prostate Cancer UK has a simple ambition: to stop men dying from prostate cancer – by driving improvements in prevention, diagnosis, treatment and support.

Download and order our fact sheets and booklets from our website at **prostatecanceruk.org/publications** or call us on **0800 074 8383**.

At Prostate Cancer UK, we take great care to provide up-to-date, unbiased and accurate facts about prostate cancer. We hope these will add to the medical advice you have had and help you to make decisions. Our services are not intended to replace advice from your doctor. References to sources of information used in the production of this fact sheet are available at **prostatecanceruk.org**

**This publication was written and edited by** our Health Information team.

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- Roshna Bhulia, Macmillan Radiotherapy Review Radiographer, North Middlesex Hospital
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- Nicola Lancaster, Macmillan Metastatic Prostate Cancer Clinical Nurse Specialist, Darent Valley Hospital
- Our Specialist Nurses
- Our volunteers.

### Tell us what you think

If you have any comments about our publications, you can email:

**yourfeedback@prostatecanceruk.org**



**Speak to our  
Specialist Nurses**

**0800 074 8383\***

**prostatecanceruk.org**

### Donate today – help others like you

Did you find this information useful? Would you like to help others in your situation access the facts they need? Every year, over 47,000 men face a prostate cancer diagnosis. Thanks to our generous supporters, we offer information free to all who need it. If you would like to help us continue this service, please consider making a donation. Your gift could fund the following services:

- £10 could buy a Tool Kit – a set of fact sheets, tailored to the needs of each man with vital information on diagnosis, treatment and lifestyle.
- £25 could give a man diagnosed with a prostate problem unlimited time to talk over treatment options with one of our Specialist Nurses.

To make a donation of any amount, please call us on **0800 082 1616**, visit **prostatecanceruk.org/donate** or text **PROSTATE** to **70004**<sup>†</sup>.

There are many other ways to support us. For more details please visit **prostatecanceruk.org/get-involved**

<sup>†</sup> You can donate up to £10 via SMS and we will receive 100% of your donation. Texts are charged at your standard rate. For full terms and conditions and more information, please visit [prostatecanceruk.org/terms](http://prostatecanceruk.org/terms)



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**t** Follow us on Twitter: **@ProstateUK**

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**Call our Specialist Nurses from Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm, Wednesday 10am - 5pm**

\* Calls are recorded for training purposes only.  
Confidentiality is maintained between callers and Prostate Cancer UK.

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