

James' story: 'Screening saved my life'

To mark Prostate Cancer Awareness Month in March, Vitality member James offers his story showing the power of screening and how early intervention positively impacted his prostate cancer diagnosis.

With over 52,000 men diagnosed each year, prostate cancer is the most common type of cancer in men.

Like any cancer, survival is greatly improved the earlier it's caught and treated. However, over 12,000 men die each year because of prostate cancer¹ and there's not currently a UK-wide publicly funded screening programme.

For 62-year-old Vitality member James, it wasn't something that was on his radar at all.

PSA – prostate-specific antigen – blood testing remains the most common means of detecting prostate cancer. However, because the cancer can often take a long time to develop with no immediate symptoms, it can be hard to detect and blood tests aren't always accurate.

However, after taking out a [private medical insurance \(PMI\)](#) plan in early 2023, he and his wife decided to take the opportunity to undergo an extensive [Bluecrest](#) health screening, available to him immediately through his plan.

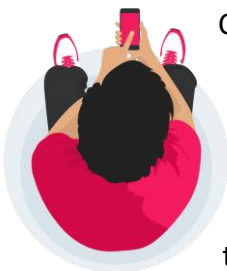
In recent years, we've seen the roll of PMI expand to involve more [everyday healthcare benefits](#). Primary care services such as health checks, screenings and virtual GPs can play a vital role in the prevention and early detection of illness, particularly at a time these services are either unavailable or severely stretched through the NHS.

In James' case, accessing these services would have life-saving consequences.

"The cancer nurse from Vitality was tremendous. I was able to see the consultant and ask relevant questions. I didn't have to turn to 'Dr Google'... I felt a lot more in control"

James Greer
Vitality Member

'I quickly made an appointment'



Completing the screening a few months after buying his plan, James got the results back and found out he had a high PSA reading. He was advised to book a [Vitality GP](#) appointment to discuss the next steps.

"I quickly made an appointment with the Vitality GP online and they had all my test results in front of them. The GP advised me to have more follow-up tests."

Further blood tests and investigations, carried out through the NHS revealed that James' PSA level was rising rapidly and eventually a biopsy picked up several areas of concern.



Early detection is key

The results from the biopsy confirmed the presence of cancer. Because it had been picked up so early thanks to the screening, the outlook was positive.

“The doctors told me that it was all contained within the prostate and hadn’t spread, and therefore was very treatable at this stage.”

After being given several treatment options, including surgery or radiotherapy, James was able to call on the support and expertise of Vitality’s specialist cancer claim team to guide him through the options.

‘I didn’t need to turn to ‘Dr Google’

Navigating a healthcare journey and understanding the implications of various treatment options can be challenging, especially with something as serious as cancer. Most of us aren’t medical experts, so our understanding of medical jargon is limited.

Thankfully, James was supported by the Vitality Care team of trained medical professionals and cancer specialists, to help guide him through the journey.



“The cancer nurse from Vitality, who’s main area of interest was prostate cancer, was tremendous. I was able to see the consultant and ask relevant questions. I didn’t have to turn to ‘Dr Google’, and I felt a lot more in control.”

Guided by an expert along the way, James was able to make a more informed decision about his treatment pathway as part of a joined-up care journey. Rather than, as he describes, needing to “take a stab in the dark”.

Based on the information he received, James was able to choose his preferred choice of radiotherapy, safe in the knowledge he’d made the right decision for him.

‘I felt I wasn’t alone’

In James’ case, the new type of radiotherapy he opted for was carried out on the NHS. However, his PMI plan helped to facilitate his end-to-end care journey and support him throughout - from early detection to GP appointment through to appropriate guidance, as well as advice on lifestyle choices and physical activity along the way.

“The cancer support team spoke to me about things like nutrition to help with recovery, or the side effects of treatment, so I knew what was coming. The fear was taken away.”

“They also sent me a package in the post with a blanket and a few other things. That brought me to tears. I just felt I wasn’t alone on this journey.”

‘That screening saved my life’

With his treatment finished at the end of 2023, James is on the road to recovery and looking forward to getting back to work and on with his life.

“I’m in a good place now, mentally and physically and much improved. Vitality offered me a couple of days at a health resort (Champneys), which I might take up... My wife may want to come with me as well!”

James’ hope though is that through sharing his story, more people will get themselves checked out, not just for prostate cancer, but their health more generally.

“I want more people to be made aware of the need to get checked out and how important it is. The NHS does a fantastic job, but these health screenings aren’t always available.”

“It’s why I say that screening ultimately could have saved my life, because I wouldn’t have gone for that screening were it not for my PMI. I didn’t see it as important. Now I see it as vital.”

[Find out more](#) about how Vitality's Private Medical Insurance can offer your clients complete end-to-end healthcare, incorporating prevention and early intervention benefits.