

BPH and Prostate Health

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Many men suffer from symptoms as a result of an enlarged prostate gland. These problems seem to increase over time and peak incidence occurs in a man's early 60's. As many as 80% of American men will experience some evidence of an enlarged prostate. The most prevalent culprit of an unhealthy prostate gland is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

What is the prostate?:

The prostate is a gland present in men only. It normally is the size and shape of a walnut that sits at the base of a

man's bladder surrounding the urethra. While some functions are still unknown, the prostate releases fluids aiding in reproduction as well as having antibacterial properties.

When Things go Wrong (BPH):

BPH occurs when the prostate grows to become abnormally large. While the exact reason for the growth remains unclear, a couple theories may account for the abnormal growth. The predominant theory is that there is an excess of dihydrotestosterone (DHT) within the prostate. Testosterone gets converted to DHT inside the prostate and can lead to abnormal cell growth.

The symptoms men experience from BPH coincide with the prostate's location. The enlarged prostate constricts the urethra so urine flow becomes altered. This problem may present differently among men, but common urinary problems include:

- A hesitant, interrupted, weak stream
- Urgency to urinate
- Leaking or dribbling of urine after urinating
- Incomplete bladder emptying
- Straining to urinate
- Urinary retention

(NOTE: If you are experiencing any of these problems, it may be beneficial to discuss these with a healthcare provider)

Diagnosing BPH:

Only a physician can diagnose BPH. Diagnosis of BPH is determined through physical examination, objective measures of bladder emptying, and laboratory tests. The two most common tests include a digital rectal exam (DRE) and prostate-specific antigen (PSA) blood test.

The DRE is an important diagnostic tool, as the physician will be able to determine any abnormalities in prostate size, shape, and smoothness.

The PSA is a simple blood test that is used to estimate the prostate size. It is also useful in screening and monitoring for prostate cancer. Results of 0-4 ng/ml are reported as normal. Results that are higher than 4 ng/ml may warrant further evaluation.

It is very important that men discuss prostate health with their healthcare provider. Failure to do so may lead to long-term or more serious health concerns. Complications of BPH include chronic kidney disease, presence of blood in the urine, urinary incontinence, recurrent urinary tract infection, or bladder stones.

Another prostate-specific diagnosis includes prostate cancer. Early detection of this disease can make the disease more manageable to treat. Only your doctor can determine the difference between BPH and a more severe disease such as prostate cancer.

DRUGS WHICH MAY TEMPORARILY EXACERBATE SYMPTOMS OF BPH:

- Diuretics (i.e. Furosemide)
- Testosterone (i.e. Androgel)
- Decongestants (i.e. Pseudoephedrine)
- Antihistamines (i.e. Benadryl)
- Antidepressants (i.e. Amitriptyline)
- Anticholinergic drugs for Parkinson's Disease (i.e. Bzotropine)

* It is important to remember to discuss all medications with your doctor and ask a pharmacist for aid when choosing an OTC product.

ALL MEN OVER THE AGE OF 50 ARE ADVISED TO HAVE AN ANNUAL PHYSICAL EXAM CONSISTING ON A DIGITAL RECTAL EXAM AND PROSTATE-SPECIFIC BLOOD TEST.

Treatment Goals:

- Improve symptoms
- Relieve obstruction
- Improve bladder emptying
- Prevent acute urinary retention

Treatment Options:

- Watchful waiting
- Prescription Drug therapy
- Surgery

Watchful Waiting:

Watchful waiting is appropriate for men with mild disease, or moderate disease with only mildly bothersome symptoms without any complications. It is important that patients still go for check-ups every year to have an annual evaluation. Watchful waiting patients are encouraged to slightly alter their everyday activities in order to lessen BPH complications. Some modifications include fluid restriction before bed, avoiding caffeine and alcohol, frequent bladder emptying, and avoiding medications that can exacerbate symptoms.

5-alpha Reductase Inhibitors:

*Finasteride (Proscar)**

Dutasteride (Avodart)

Alpha-adrenergic Blockers:

*Terazosin (Hytrin)**

*Doxazosin (Cardura)**

*Tamsulosin (Flomax)**

Alfuzosin (Uroxatral)

Combination Products:

Dutasteride / Tamsulosin (Jalyn)

(* denotes generic availability)

Prescription Drug Therapy:

Prescription drugs are most useful for men with moderate BPH or for short-time use in severe BPH situations. These drugs can be classified into one of two available groups. The two groups are alpha-adrenergic blockers and 5-alpha reductase inhibitors. Alpha-adrenergic blockers work by relieving constriction placed around the urethra by the enlarged prostate. 5-alpha reductase inhibitors work by decreasing the amount of testosterone directly affecting prostate growth.

Alpha-adrenergic Blockers:

These agents do not actually shrink the prostate but allow urine to flow more easily. Partial symptom relief may be observed in as little as one week, while full benefit takes about 2-3 months. The most common side effects include first-dose fainting, rapid drop in blood pressure, or dizziness. It is best to take these agents at night.

5-alpha Reductase Inhibitors:

These agents effectively shrink the prostate and reduce PSA levels by 50%. A disadvantage is that it takes nearly 6 months to see a full effect. Sexual dysfunction is a common side effect and birth defects can occur if the medication is handled by pregnant women.

Surgery:

A surgical procedure is the gold standard treatment for BPH. Possible side effects include sexual dysfunction, bleeding, and urinary incontinence.

Talking with Your Physician:

Men are often hesitant to discuss the health of their prostate with their healthcare provider. It is important to remember that symptoms are similar between BPH and more serious conditions such as prostate cancer. Screening and diagnosis combines a wide range of questions, physical examination and laboratory data to determine a diagnosis of your symptoms. This is why it is so important to see your health care provider routinely to be evaluated. A healthy prostate results in a happier and healthier life and could help prevent long term complications by catching serious diseases early on. Make talking to your physician about your prostate a priority each and every year!

CONTACT US: While it is important to keep open lines of communication with your physician and local pharmacist regarding your prescriptions, we understand that the amount of information received can sometimes be overwhelming.

We would like to remind you that our clinical department is here to help! We want to see our members taking the right medication at the right cost. While not all medications have a true generic, there are often therapeutic alternatives available that could provide the same benefit, while costing you less.

Please feel free to contact our clinical department at any time for questions regarding your prescriptions, or for cost-saving alternatives.

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at: www.proactrx.com



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