

TOPIC: PROSTATE HEALTH

Sponsored by the Harvard School of Public Health and funded by the National Cancer Institute, the Health Professionals Follow-Up Study (HPFS) began in 1986 with an enrollment of over 50,000 men. The purpose of the study is to investigate a series of conjectures about men's health, relating nutritional factors to the incidence of serious illnesses, such as cancer, heart disease, and other vascular diseases.¹

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nutrition^{NEWS}

The Seat of Masculinity

Protecting Prostate Health

- What Is The Prostate?
- What Are Its Major Problems?
- What Symptoms Are You Aware Of?
- What Are The Possible Treatments?
- What Can You Do To Protect Your Prostate?

To Learn More About
"The Seat Of Masculinity", Look Inside....

The Seat Of Masculinity

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland, located between the bladder and the rectum, and surrounding the *urethra*². (See figure.) The main role of the prostate is the production of seminal fluid. In fact, it is the power of the prostate which expels the fluid during orgasm.³ Both because of its location and its function, the prostate is sometimes called “the seat of masculinity”.

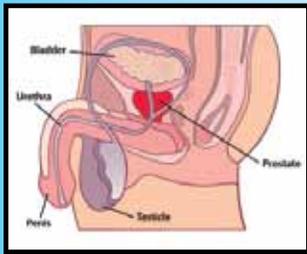
A man needs to understand how his body functions. Such understanding supports the reasonableness of good health care. In this issue of *Nutrition News*, we discuss the prostate gland, covering its function, the three most typical problems, and natural approaches to prostate health.

Most of the time, the prostate is easy to ignore. However, when something goes wrong, it demands attention. Being informed about symptoms can allay fears and help you to know when to seek help. Further, this knowledge can help you ameliorate some symptoms or possibly avoid them.

One of the biggest misconceptions about the gland is that prostate problems result in the inability to become erect. This is not true. The majority of men treated for prostate problems report no loss in this area. Besides its sexual involvement, the prostate is vital for proper bladder function and urine flow-rate control. **Because the gland wraps around the urethra, urinary difficulties are often the first sign of prostate problems.**

The Big 3

The three most common prostate problems are 1) **prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate)**; 2) **benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH, also known as enlarged prostate)**; and 3) **prostate cancer**. All three are characterized by a frequent need to urinate. Since prostate illness can be serious, men who are experiencing any urinary problems are strongly urged to consult a physician for a professional diagnosis and possible treatment plan.



Let's take a closer look at each of these three common prostate diseases.

1) Prostatitis (inflammation of the prostate) is the most common of all prostate conditions. Typically, affecting men between the ages of 20 and 50, prostatitis may be caused by bacteria or chlamydia (a sexually transmitted organism), most often it isn't. Symptoms of prostatitis can resemble those of a kidney infection with pain in the lower back. They can also include frequent urination, pain during urination and or ejaculation, and extreme discomfort. Flu-like symptoms often accompany bacterial infections. If you experience any of these symptoms, see your doctor.

Infectious prostatitis has been linked to excess consumption of caffeine, alcohol, and spicy foods which can deplete the body's stores of zinc, vitamin C, and proteolytic enzymes (enzymes which breakdown protein). This decreases resistance to infection. **Testing can reveal whether infectious prostatitis is the culprit.** Then, antibiotics will be prescribed.

2) Benign prostatic hyperplasia or BPH is caused by enlargement of the prostate. As a man ages, his prostate

continues to grow. Eventually, it squeezes the urethra, affecting urination. At 30, a man has only a 10 percent risk of BPH; by 60 more than 50 percent of men are affected and by 85 that number is 90 percent. Left untreated, BPH can eventually block the flow of urine. This obstruction can lead to blood in the urine, a potentially life-threatening condition. Also, urine can stagnate in the bladder, increasing the risk of infection and kidney stone formation.

BPH is characterized by the following uncomfortable symptoms: difficulty in starting to urinate, increased urinary frequency, reduced force and volume of urination, and the need for nighttime urination. Sleep deprivation is common among men with BPH who may get up to pee 4-5 times during the night.

Sad to say, conventional medical treatments often create additional problems. For example, many prostate medications can cause impotence, decreased libido, breast tenderness and enlargement, and other reactions, such as lip swelling or skin rashes. Further, medications can be pricey.

Transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP), a surgical treatment, has been widely used to treat BPH since the 1940s. In this procedure a larger channel for the urethra is created, allowing a more forceful stream of urine. Recovery usually takes six to eight weeks. However, about 25 percent of men have complications. These include bleeding, infection, incontinence, and impotence. In addition, surgery always carries some risk, especially for elderly patients.

3) Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men, no matter their race or ethnicity – and it is the most frequently diagnosed cancer in the US. According to the National Cancer Institute, an estimated 240,000 men will be diagnosed with prostate cancer in 2013 while nearly 30,000 will die from it.



Like BPH, prostate cancer is more likely to affect older men. Fortunately, it is often a slow-growing cancer. It can lie dormant for so long that the man who has it may die of entirely unrelated causes.

There is a saying that *men are more likely to die with prostate cancer, than die of prostate cancer.*

In some cases, the cancer “wakes up” and takes over. When this happens, the disease may not be discovered until it has spread. If you would like to know more about the treatment of prostate cancer, one source is the “Patient’s Guide” published online by the University of California San Francisco Medical Center. (Search www.ucsfhealth.org, then, [patients_guide_to_prostate_cancer/treatments](#).)

1 To learn more about the phenomenal long range study, see <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/hpfs/index.html>. The complementary study for women is the Nurses Health Study with over 200,000 participants: <http://www.channing.harvard.edu/nhs/>.

2 The urethra is the tube that connects to the bladder and carries urine through the penis.

3 Not only does this fluid guard against infection of the urinary tract it also makes the woman's vaginal canal less acidic during sex.

Prostate cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer death in men. Only lung cancer is more lethal. Until recently, a blood test measuring PSA (prostate specific antigen) was used for regular prostate screening. This is no longer recommended. A great controversy has ensued. (See “PSA: Yea Or Nay?”, back page.)

What You Can Do, Naturally

Although prostate problems are prevalent in Western society, they are not inevitable. Improving your diet, taking the appropriate supplements, and adopting healthier lifestyle habits can all help you to keep your prostate healthy.

Here, we talk about possible natural approaches to the 3 prostate problems discussed above.

1) Prostatitis – Flower pollen extracts have been used successfully in the treatment of chronic prostatitis for over 30 years. A Swedish product called Cernitin is produced using flower pollens (not bee pollen) which are gathered and then purified. In one early study (1989), researchers reported that Cernitin extract was given to 15 patients ages 23 to 63 years with chronic prostatitis. Treatment lasted from one to 18 months. Seven patients became symptom-free, six significantly improved, and two failed to respond. Two patients had a recurrence after cessation of treatment. Health was restored when recommencing Cernitin. No adverse side effects were noted, and most of the patients chose to continue taking the extract.

Saw Palmetto For Your Prostate

There is a plethora of science to support the use of saw palmetto berry (*Serenoa repens*) for enlarged prostate (BPH). **The standardized extract of the saw palmetto berry has been shown to reduce inflammation and to stop prostate cells from multiplying.** It is this cell proliferation (hyperplasia) that is for responsible for BPH.

A meta-analysis (treating the data from many studies as one large study), published in *JAMA*, evaluated 18 randomized, controlled trials involving 2,939 men. Researchers concluded, “The evidence suggests that *S. repens* [saw palmetto] improves urologic symptoms and flow measures. **Compared to finasteride [a drug commonly prescribed for BPH], *S. repens* produced similar improvement in urinary flow and was associated with fewer [side effects].”**”

2) BPH – Several natural compounds are proven to help relieve the symptoms of BPH without the side effects of mainstream treatments. Your doctor may know about the following herbs and nutrient.

• **Saw palmetto berry extract** (*Serenoa repens*) is the best known, most extensively studied, and most widely used herbal medicine for BPH. (See sidebar “Saw Palmetto For Your Prostate”.)

• **Flower pollen extracts** (Cernitin) have also proven useful for BPH although its exact mode of action is unknown. Possible mechanisms include anti-inflammatory factors as well as others thought to limit prostate growth. This product has many additional health benefits, including immune function and liver support.

• **Pygeum** (*Pygeum africanum*) is another effective herb for BPH. A multicenter study in Central Europe focused on 85 men,

50 to 75 years old, who suffered from BPH symptoms. Study participants took Pygeum extract for two months and enjoyed significant improvements in urinary flow. Researchers noted that Pygeum was well-tolerated and non-toxic.

• **Nettle** (*Urtica dioica*, stinging nettle) contains vitamin C, iron, and other nutrients that support prostate health. Nettle demonstrates anti-inflammatory activity and is often combined with saw palmetto berry and Pygeum in herbal prostate formulas.

• **Lycopene** is an antioxidant carotenoid. Tomatoes are especially rich this substance and supplements are available. Several prestigious studies have shown that lycopene promotes prostate health. More lycopene activity comes from cooked tomato.



• **Zinc** is an important mineral that is highly concentrated in the prostate. **Zinc deficiency is considered a risk factor for the development of BPH.** Such deficiencies are common among older men in North America. The RDA for men 14 and older is 11 mg per day. Oysters are the classic food source although other seafoods, meats, and dairy are also good. Wheatgerm and pumpkin seeds are plant sources. We use zinc citrate supplements.

• **Essential fatty acids** (EFAs) critical for prostate function, fish oils are preferred. The body can also make them from flaxseed or oil and from pumpkin seeds. Pumpkin seeds also provide zinc.

3) Prostate Cancer – *Life Extension* editor William Falloon writes, “**Cancer cells lurk in the prostate glands of most aging men, yet only one in six is ever diagnosed....** natural barriers exist to protect people against full-blown cancer.” He goes on to state that the dietary choices of many men override the barriers, providing fuel for cancer cells to propagate and metastasize.

Men can reinforce their protective barriers by utilizing natural compounds. A case in point appeared in *The Prostate* (January 2013). Researchers conducted a 6-month trial with 203 male patients. Dividing the men into two groups, one group took a specially developed superfood capsule while the others took a placebo.

The PSA levels of men taking the superfood capsule were reduced by 63 percent compared with those taking the placebo. This is the first time scientists have firmly established an influence on a marker of cancer progression using a scientifically robust evaluation. **The capsule contained essence of pomegranate, green tea, turmeric, and broccoli.** Of course, these same whole foods provide protection.

Dietary Guidelines

EAT

- plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables.
- lots of legumes (especially soybeans).
- fresh fish (particularly salmon, sardines, mackerel, and cod).
- whole rather than refined grains.
- organically grown foods whenever possible.

AVOID

- fatty meats or processed fats.
- refined sugars (like cakes, candies, pie).
- adding salt to your food.
- fast food and junk food.
- canned, packaged, or otherwise processed foods.
- caffeine, sodas, and alcohol.

Here are some other proven protectors:

• **Garlic:** the National Cancer Institute recognizes garlic as a protector *against* cancer. In 1997, the *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* published an *in vitro* study pitting aged

garlic against prostate cancer cells. The research showed that a compound in aged garlic extract (S-allyl mercapto cysteine) reduces prostate cancer growth by over 50 percent. Aged garlic also stimulates immune function by activating macrophages, spleen cells, and natural killer cells.

• **Lycopene** starred recently in *Cancer Prevention Research*. The article showed once again that lycopene has multiple anti-cancer and antioxidant properties. Amounts used in this *in vitro* study were comparable to 30 mg in an adult man. A previous study at Northwestern University Medical School reported, **“Lycopene was the only antioxidant found at significantly lower levels in [cancer] cases than in matched controls.... increased consumption of tomato products and other lycopene-containing foods might reduce the occurrence or progression [It., ed.] of prostate cancer.”**

• **Vitamin C and beta-carotene** appear to protect against prostate cancer. One prospective study involved 1,899 middle-aged men. At a 30 year follow-up, 132 had developed prostate cancer. Researchers stated, “Overall survival over the 30 years of follow-up was positively associated with intake of beta-carotene and vitamin C.”

• **Zinc** helps block the uptake of testosterone into the prostate.

(Testosterone can stimulate tissue growth.) As an antioxidant, zinc also protects against damaging free radicals that increase the risk of prostate cancer.

• **Vitamin D** has been shown to significantly reduce the risk of prostate cancer, and can be used to treat this condition. Depending on the source, popular recommendations range from 1000 - 5000 IU/d.

• **Proteolytic enzymes** (protein digesters) don't just make more nutrients available to the body by promoting healthy digestion. When taken on an empty stomach, these protein-digesting enzymes help dissolve the coating around cancer cells, leaving them vulnerable to the attack of white blood cells. Digestive enzyme supplements which contain proteolytic enzymes may list them on the labels as proteases. **Both papain from green papaya and bromelain from pineapple are proteolytic enzymes.**

Closing Thoughts

Don't forget to exercise. The editors at “Harvard Health Publications” share the following two studies. From a cohort of more than 30,000 men in the HPFS (see cover), researchers found that those who were more physically active were less likely to suffer from BPH. **Even easy activities, such as walking regularly at a moderate pace, yielded benefits.**

Secondly, in an Italian study, 231 sedentary men with chronic prostatitis were assigned to one of two exercise programs for 18 weeks: aerobic exercise or nonaerobic exercise (such as sit-ups and stretching). Each group exercised three times a week. Results showed that men in both groups felt better, but **those in the aerobic exercise group experienced significantly greater improvements in quality of life, including decreased prostatitis pain, anxiety, and depression.**

Siri Says: Men in North America can substantially reduce their risk of prostate problems by making healthy lifestyle choices. These cannot guarantee life long prostate health, but they are certainly steps in the right direction. **No one can do more for the prostate than the man who owns it.**

PSA: Yea Or Nay?

In October 2011, the US Preventive Services Task Force⁴ recommended that men not get routine PSA screening for prostate cancer. The issue of PSA (prostate-specific antigen) screening has remained a hot bed of discussion. In particular, many health care professionals declared that the baby had been thrown out with the bath water.

The USPSTF has never recommended routine screening, but its decision against using it except in special cases* was based on several large trials showing that **even though the PSA blood test can detect cancer early, it saves few, if any, lives and often leads to treatments causing serious complications, including incontinence and impotence, not to mention the mental and physical pain and suffering.**

Want to know more? An article from the editors of *Berkeley Wellness* gives a very even-handed overview of this situation. (Search www.berkeleywellness.com and then search prostate-cancer-test-pros-and-cons.) For a more edgy position, read the *Life Extension* article in which Stephen Strum, MD, proposes that the problem lies with physicians who misuse and misinterpret the test. (Search www.lef.org and search PSA-Controversy-Part I.)

*Note: The USPSTF guidelines focus only on routine screening, not the use of PSA in men with symptoms or signs of prostate cancer nor for its use to monitor cancer treatment.

Related Resources

Each month, Nutrition News features three additional titles to support our main topic. This month's selections are “Fitness”, “Men's Health”, and “Heart Supplements”.



Fitness



Men's Health



Heart Supplements

4 The USPSTF is an independent panel of non-Federal medical experts who are primary care providers, such as family physicians, nurses, etc. They review a broad range of clinical preventive health care services (such as screening, counseling, and preventive medications) and develop “Recommendation Statements.” for primary care clinicians and health systems.

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