



ASHEVILLE INTEGRATIVE MEDICINE

James Biddle, M.D.

Maintaining Good Prostate Health

by Richard Gloor, DO

As men age a medical problem they encounter is difficulty with their prostate. This article will discuss the most common prostate problem, BPH, Benign (non-cancerous) prostatic hyperplasia (enlargement). BPH is a medical condition of epidemic proportions. Some estimates indicate as many as 50% of men over the age of 50 will begin to experience symptoms of BPH. By age 60 this number swells to 80%. Strategically located just below the bladder, as one's prostate enlarges, symptoms manifest as problems with urination. Common early complaints include; frequent nighttime urination, difficulty starting or stopping the flow of urine, a sense of urgency, a weak urine stream, and a feeling of incomplete bladder emptying. Although these symptoms usually indicate problems with an enlarging prostate, they can mimic other medical conditions. For this reason a thorough medical exam should be the first step to determine that BPH is the problem.

What causes the prostate to enlarge? It might surprise you to learn that the exact cause is not known. Aging is a factor. BPH is a condition whose incidence increases, as men grow older. The other factor that plays a role is the male sex hormone, testosterone. The exact role this hormone plays is controversial. In fact studies have never conclusively demonstrated a direct relationship between level of testosterone and prostate enlargement.

Looking at how testosterone breaks down in the body, however can provide clues to the riddle of BPH. The two major breakdown products of testosterone are dihydrotestosterone and estrogen. Although estrogen, quite correctly, is considered the major female hormone, males do indeed produce variable amounts. Research indicates imbalances in these breakdown products contribute to accelerated prostate growth.

Therefore, when doing a thorough medical evaluation, comprehensive hormone profiles should be considered. In addition to the conventional medical evaluation, hormone profiles provide a more thorough view of how these important hormones are interacting. This information helps your physician to design a more individualized treatment plan.

If you are fortunate enough to not be experiencing any prostate symptoms or have early, mild symptoms, there are numerous steps which can be taken to improve your prostate health. Reduction of negative health habits is a good starting point. Excessive alcohol intake can negatively impact the amount of testosterone converted into estrogen. Simply decreasing ones daily alcohol intake can help slow this conversion. Similarly, as body fat increases, so does the amount of estrogen produced. Regular exercise and decreased body fat have been shown to improve prostate health. Diets high in saturated fats have been repeatedly linked to stimulating prostate growth. Essential fats (especially Omega 3 fats) in the diet have shown to have an opposite effect. Foods high in lycopenes (the red pigment in tomatoes) can also be supportive of your prostate.



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Several simple behavioral changes help improve perhaps the most annoying symptom of BPH, frequent nighttime urination. Try to decrease the amount of fluids taken within 3 hours of bedtime. It is especially important to eliminate those fluids which have a diuretic effect, i.e. caffeine and alcohol. Finally, an extra effort to fully empty one's bladder prior to bedtime may help to eliminate those 2-3 a.m. pit stops.

In addition to the above, there are several supplemental and herbal recommendations. A diet high in zinc containing foods and the use of the herb, Saw Palmetto, can both help to slow prostate growth. The herbs, Stinging Nettle, Cernilton (flower pollen) and Pygeum have been reported to provide symptomatic relief.

Implementing the above recommendations and working with a physician knowledgeable in hormone evaluations and with complimentary treatments, can provide a winning combination to improved prostate health.

Bio: Dr. Gloor is board certified in Family Practice. For the 12 years prior to joining Asheville Integrative Medicine, he practiced family medicine in Toledo, Ohio. He is currently working to integrate conventional medicine with effective complimentary and alternative treatments.