

GOT BPH?

Drug-free ways to manage an enlarged prostate

by Holly Lucille, ND, RN

For most men, prostate troubles may seem as inevitable as gray hair and wrinkles are. At first, you notice a little hesitancy when trying to urinate. Or maybe your urine stream seems weak or intermittent. Worse yet, you find yourself getting up repeatedly at night to urinate, or you feel like your bladder is still partly full after you've gone. Welcome to benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH, a noncancerous condition in which your prostate becomes enlarged and triggers these and other urinary symptoms.

Approximately half of all men over the age of 50 develop BPH. That figure

skyrockets to 90 percent of men over the age of 80. But it's not all gloom and doom. First of all, BPH won't increase your risk of developing prostate cancer, even though some of the symptoms are similar. The second piece of good news? There are a number of natural things you can do to ease symptoms and potentially slow growth. But before we get to these safe and effective strategies, it's important to understand why this often-ignored gland matters.

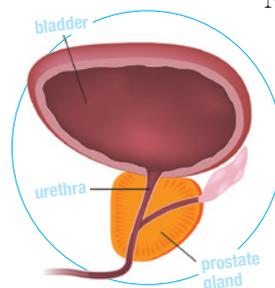
Prostate 101

Your prostate gland is about the size and shape of a walnut and weighs just about an ounce. It sits between your bladder and the base of the penis, just in front of the rectum, and it encircles your urethra (a long tube that carries semen and

urine out of the body) like a collar. Although it's considered to be one gland, your prostate is actually made up of a network of smaller glands arranged in lobes, as well as muscle and connective tissue, all wrapped up in a fibrous shell.

As a key part of a man's reproductive system, the prostate produces seminal fluid—a milky substance that makes up about 20 to 30 percent of semen. During sex, the muscles in the prostate help transport prostate fluid and semen into the urethra, where it is forcefully expelled during ejaculation.

Normally, this tiny gland experiences a growth spurt during puberty to coincide with an increase in testosterone. Then, around the age of 50, growth begins again—this time at a much slower rate—and continues throughout the rest of your life.



This growth typically doesn't become a problem until your later years, but once it does, it can definitely impact your quality of life.

The BPH Boys' Club

What causes BPH? Although researchers aren't 100 percent sure, they believe that growth of the gland is triggered by hormonal changes. As the prostate becomes larger, it eventually squeezes the urethra like a clamp on a hose, blocking the flow of urine. This can, in turn, cause a variety of urinary problems such as dribbling, a weak urinary stream, incomplete emptying of the bladder, and the frequent urge to urinate, especially at night. What's more, it can have an adverse effect on your sexual function.

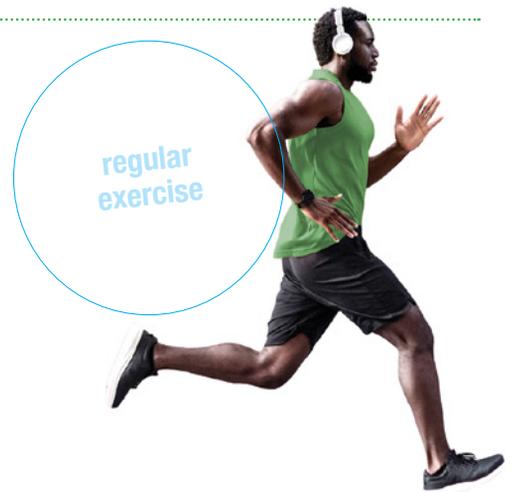
Even though growing older is the primary risk factor for BPH, other factors include existing cardiovascular disease, erectile dysfunction, obesity, a sedentary lifestyle, type 2 diabetes, and a family history of the condition. An abnormality in your testicles can also raise your risk.

Keeping BPH in Check

Conventional treatment of BPH includes pharmaceutical drugs and surgery. But these measures can result in some unwelcome side effects. Fortunately, there are a number of effective ways to improve BPH, starting with your habits.

First up, your diet. Studies show that what you eat can impact your risk of

BPH. For instance, when Australian researchers analyzed data from 868 men, they found that those eating a whole-foods diet rich in vegetables and lean red meat had a lower risk. And preliminary research suggests that adopting a ketogenic diet may reduce inflammation and improve BPH symptoms in much the same way as the popular prostate drug finasteride—but without side effects.



Exercise is also important. In one large clinical trial, men who worked out on a regular basis for at least an hour per week were 13 percent less likely to report repeated nighttime trips to the bathroom (technically known as nocturia) than those who didn't exercise at all. Those who were physically active yet still reported nocturia had 34 percent less-severe cases than their sedentary counterparts.

While all types of physical activity benefit the prostate, there's one specific exercise that can improve BPH symptoms—Kegels. Studies show that practicing this exercise strengthens the pelvic floor muscles, reduces urinary incontinence, and enhances the quality of life in men with BPH. Best of all, Kegels are easy to do and can be done anytime, anywhere! Simply tighten your pelvic floor muscles (to do this, think of pulling in and lifting up your genitals), hold the contraction for five seconds, and then relax for five seconds. Repeat several times in a row.

Prostate Protectors

Supporting your prostate with diet and lifestyle is a great place to start. But adding the following botanicals and nutrients to the equation can support prostate health and relieve BPH symptoms even more.

Beta-Sitosterol. This plant sterol, which is found in fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds, has been shown to reduce the urinary symptoms of BPH by decreasing inflammation in

Quick Tips

to Reduce Symptoms

- **Empty your bladder all the way when you pass urine.**
- **Limit the amount you drink in the evening, especially beverages containing alcohol or caffeine.**
- **Urinate often to avoid long periods between bathroom breaks.**
- **Be aware that some drugs such as antidepressants, blood pressure medications, and even over-the-counter cold remedies can worsen symptoms.**

healthy diet



the prostate and increasing urinary flow rate. Beta-sitosterol works by inhibiting the activity of an enzyme called 5-alpha-reductase, a key trigger in the development of BPH. In one German study conducted at the Ruhr University Bochum, 117 men with BPH were given either beta-sitosterol or a placebo daily for one year. By the end of the study, those taking the supplement experienced a significant improvement in their symptoms and their urinary flow parameters.

Saw Palmetto. For proven symptomatic relief, nothing beats saw palmetto. Like beta-sitosterol, it reduces inflammation by inhibiting 5-alpha-reductase. This, in turn, slows or prevents prostate growth. Plus, saw palmetto improves the flow of urine and decreases the frequency of those frustrating nighttime trips to the bathroom. According to research published in the journal *American Family Physician*, saw palmetto appears to work as well as finasteride, but it's

better tolerated and less expensive. Another nine-week study also showed that men who received saw palmetto supplementation demonstrated a decrease in urinary tract symptoms

A Complicated Issue

BPH isn't just a nuisance; it can increase your risk of health complications like bladder or kidney damage, bladder stones, blood in the urine, and urinary tract infections. If you show signs of an enlarging prostate, checking in with your healthcare provider can help you sidestep these serious bladder and kidney problems.

and an increase in urine flow when compared to a placebo.

The active sterols and free fatty acids responsible for saw palmetto's BPH benefits are found in the berry. To get the most benefit from the herb, look for a supplement that uses supercritical CO₂ extraction to protect these delicate compounds in the berries. It's also important to check the label to ensure the saw palmetto is standardized to 85 to 95 percent total fatty acids and 0.20 to 0.50 percent total phytosterols.

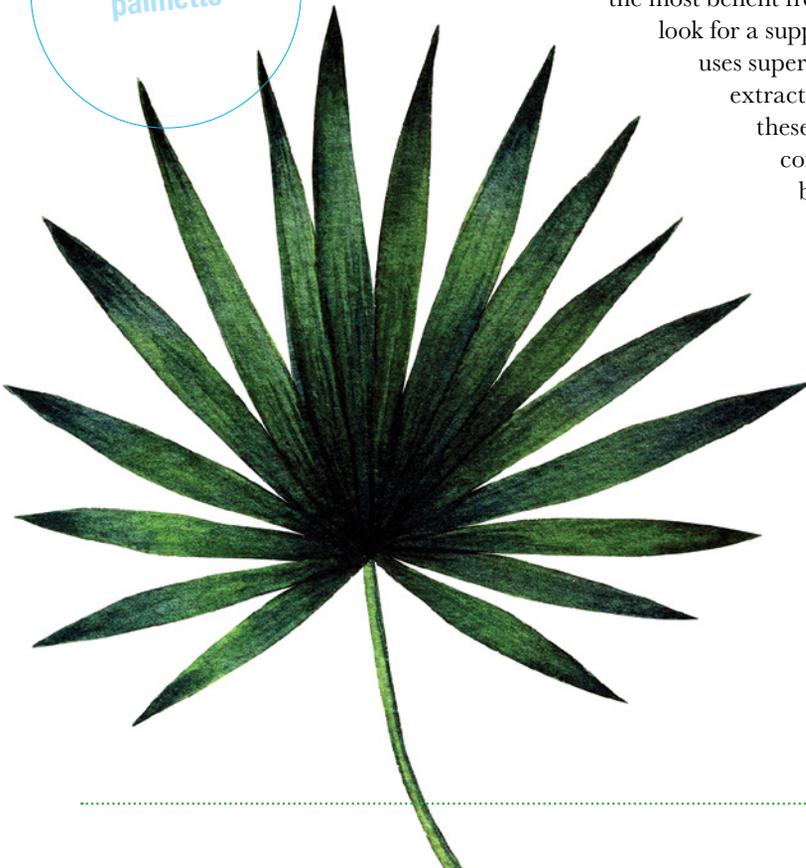
Boron. Boron is a trace element that helps maintain healthy testosterone levels and plays a beneficial role in how this and other steroid hormones function. Making sure you're getting enough may help balance testosterone levels and keep prostate volume in check. You can get some boron from foods like avocados, prune juice, and raisins, but to get prostate-friendly levels, consider taking a bioavailable form of this mineral.

Zinc. This critical mineral is best known for its ability to support immunity. But it's also important for normal prostate function—so important that the prostate contains a higher concentration of zinc than any other organ in the body does.

And yet, studies show that men over the age of 50—and especially those suffering from BPH—are alarmingly low in zinc. In fact, findings in the *Indian Journal of Urology* note that men with an enlarged prostate have, on average, 61 percent less zinc in their prostate tissues than men without the condition. Why does this matter? Because adequate zinc levels reduce inflammation and help regulate testosterone metabolism in the prostate via the 5-alpha-reductase enzyme. To effectively boost your zinc levels, however, you can optimize absorption with a chelated form of the mineral.

While you can't do anything about your age or family history, there's plenty you can do to slow prostate growth and reduce symptoms. Taking power over your prostate sooner rather than later is key to managing this all-too-common but troublesome condition. ■

saw palmetto



Holly Lucille, ND, RN, is an author, educator, and television and radio show host with a busy medical practice. An acclaimed expert in the field of integrative medicine, Dr. Lucille has a heartfelt passion for the individual wellness of all people.