

THE FAMILY GUIDE TO PROSTATE HEALTH

Although it's only about the size of a walnut, the prostate can be a troublesome gland for men over 50. The prostate produces a man's semen and is located just below the bladder in front of the rectum and surrounds the urethra – the tube that carries urine out of the bladder to the penis.

SYMPTOMS OF BPH

“Benign prostate enlargement” or BPH which stands for “benign prostate hypertrophy” – the medical term for an enlarged prostate. It's often a normal part of a man's aging process. By the time a man reaches to age of 70, he's likely to have symptoms of an enlarged prostate. These include:

- Frequent need to urinate
- Urgent need to urinate
- A burning sensation while urinating
- Getting up several times at night to urinate
- Leaking or dribbling urine
- Straining to urinate
- Stopping and starting again several times during urination

DIAGNOSING BPH

Although these symptoms are uncomfortable and annoying, the good news for your older relative -- and his family -- is that BPH is not cancer and it does not increase his risk of developing prostate cancer. Many older men learn that they have an enlarged prostate during a routine physical exam. Make sure your older relative tells the doctor about his symptoms as they can also be signs of other diseases. The doctor may refer him to a urologist -- a doctor who specializes in problems of the urinary tract and the male reproductive system -- who can decide what treatments may be needed.

MANAGING BPH

In the past BPH was treated by removing the prostate so that the bladder could empty completely. Although surgery usually makes urination easier, some men experience changes in sexual function after the procedure so doctors often recommend additional tests or advise a “wait and see” approach with annual prostate exams.

Other ways you can help your parent manage BPH include:

- Encourage him to limit drinking liquids in the evening – especially those containing alcohol or caffeine.
- Suggest that he visit the bathroom often. He shouldn't go for long periods without urinating.
- Remind him to use the bathroom before he goes to bed.

Several medications are available that can shrink the size of the prostate or stop its growth and make it possible for your parent avoid surgery.

MEDICATIONS & BPH THAT DON'T MIX

Certain over-the-counter and prescription medications can also make your older relative's prostate symptoms worse. Check with his doctor or pharmacist before he takes:

- Antihistamines
- Over-the-counter cold medicines
- Tranquilizers
- Antidepressants
- Blood pressure medications

THE BPH CONVERSATION

Talking with an older spouse or parent about BPH may be difficult for you and your family member. It's a sensitive topic to discuss— especially if you are a woman. However without treatment BPH can cause serious health problems – urinary tract infections, bladder or kidney damage, bladder stones and incontinence. With early diagnosis and treatment disease its symptoms can be managed and your parent will be relieved of annoying, uncomfortable, and embarrassing symptoms.

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