

## Men's Health: Understanding Prostate Problems

Do you know that the June 15<sup>th</sup> is Father's day and that the month of June is National Men's Health month? Do you know that more males are born than females, but tend to have more serious health problems than females? Do you know that men are less likely to have a routine medical check-up than women? This article about prostate health is dedicated to men, fathers and those who love and care about them. The prostate gland is a small organ in the man's body and about the size of a walnut. It lies below the bladder, where urine is stored, and surrounds the tube that conveys urine and semen from the body. The prostate gland also makes a fluid that becomes part of semen or the white fluid that contains sperms.

Prostate problems can be common in men who are 50 years or older and most of these problems can be successfully treated without harming sexual function. Health care providers can easily examine the prostate gland during a rectal examination. Urologists are physicians specialized in treating genital and urinary system problems in men, including prostate problems. Prostate problems can be divided into two categories:

1. Non-cancerous (not due to cancer).
2. Cancerous (due to cancer).

Here are examples and brief discussions of the categories.

### **Non-Cancerous Prostate Problems:**

Acute Prostatitis is a bacterial infection that affects the prostate gland, and can occur at any age. Common symptoms of this condition include fever, chills, pain in the lower back, and between the legs. This condition can be successfully treated with antibiotics.

Chronic Prostatitis is a prostate problem that happens often and usually seen in older men. Symptoms are similar to those of the acute type cited above, but without fevers and usually milder in nature.

Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) is an enlargement of the prostate gland, which is common in middle age and older men. The enlarged prostate may eventually block the urinary passage or urethra, making it difficult for the individual to urinate. This type of prostate problem is diagnosed or confirmed through a rectal examination. Use of prescription drugs to relax the prostate tissue, and surgery to open the enlarged prostate are common intervention for benign prostate enlargement.

Cancerous prostate problem (Prostate Cancer) is one of the most common cancers among American men and about 80 % of cases occur in men over 65. Prostate cancer is more common in African-American men than White men. In the early stages, prostate cancer cells are confined to the prostate gland and not life threatening, but may later spread to other parts of the body and eventually cause death. According to the National Cancer Society (NCS), 210,000 cases of prostate cancer were diagnosed last year, and 42,000 persons died of this cancer.

Diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer: Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) is a blood test that helps health care providers diagnose prostate cancer. It should be noted that a high PSA reading can be seen in both prostate problems that are cancerous and non-cancerous. As a result, where prostate cancer is suspected after a high PSA reading, the health care provider will most likely do a biopsy, a procedure, which involves obtaining small prostate tissue to examine under the microscope for the presence of cancerous cells.

**Treatment of prostate cancer:** Prostate cancer can be treated in a variety of ways and include:

Watchful waiting followed by regular medical checkups to determine progress of the disease.

Surgery to remove the entire prostate gland and surrounding tissues followed by radiation and hormone therapy.

**Protection against Prostate Cancer:** Steps to protect against prostate cancer include:

Have a regular medical checkups that include a digital prostate examination. This recommendation includes those who have had previous prostate surgery, due to BPH earlier discussed. Because only part of the prostate tissue is removed in surgery for BPH, the remaining tissue can become cancerous. Early detection of prostate cancer, as well as other cancers is important, so the sooner the problem is diagnosed, the better the chances that treatment will work. See your healthcare provider if you experience any of the following: frequent urge to urinate, difficulty urinating, dribbling of urine, and urinary incontinence or inability to control the flow of urine.

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