

Natural Remedies To Promote Prostate Health



"No man has the power to stop the passage of time. But every man has the power to make aging more healthy and less harmful."

~ Decker Weiss, NMD, FASA

Are you in your 50s or 60s and starting to think more about your health? Have you experienced any of these urinary problems: increased urinary frequency during the day or night; urgency; hesitancy; straining; dribbling/difficulty stopping; decreased stream size or force; pain; burning; lower back/pelvic/hip/upper thigh discomfort; or continued need to urinate after voiding? Has your doctor suggested that you go for regular prostate exams or testing, or perhaps has recommended prostate drugs or surgery? While a complete discussion of the various potential prostate difficulties, and the numerous complementary alternatives to prostate drugs, is beyond the scope of this article, you might consider some of the plant-derived remedies below if you wish to enhance your prostate health naturally.

Definitions

The prostate is a walnut-sized male sex gland that encircles the urethra, the tube through which urine is voided. Contraction of its muscles produces prostatic fluid, which is the principle component of male ejaculate and nourishes sperm. This gland is the most common site of disorders in the male genitourinary system (consisting of the kidneys, two ureters leading from the kidneys to the bladder, and the urethra), namely: (1) prostatitis [inflammation/enlargement of the prostate, common in men of all ages and caused by bacterial infection, pelvic tension, autoimmunity (attack of the immune system against the urinary tract), high uric acid levels, or hormonal changes]; (2) benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) [gradual prostate enlargement in approximately 50% of all men over age 50 and 90% of all men over age 70, believed to be caused largely by dihydrotestosterone (DHT) production and/or age-related

hormonal changes resulting in estrogen dominance over testosterone levels in the blood]; and (3) prostate cancer [the second leading killer of men (especially African Americans), "nearly 100% survivable if detected early," with risk factors that include a personal history of BPH (due to cancer detection difficulties) or family history of prostate cancer, an animal fat-rich diet, low antioxidant consumption, vasectomy, sexual activity/veneral disease, obesity, physical inactivity, and pesticide exposure]. Early prostate cancer (referred to as T1c) usually causes no symptoms, but those that some men do experience resemble symptoms of prostatitis and BPH, most of which are noted above. Additional symptoms include bloody urine or semen and painful ejaculation. Appearance of any of these symptoms warrants a prompt visit to a urologist and/or proctologist, who may conduct one or more of these diagnostic tests: (1) blood test [an imperfect means of detecting cancer (e.g., urinary tract infections can markedly elevate PSA) that measures prostate-specific antigen (PSA), which should be below 4.0 ng/ml]; (2) urine test; (3) digital rectal exam/sonogram; (4) cystoscopy (examination of the urethra and bladder); (5) urinary tract x-rays; and/or (6) biopsy (if PSA or rectal exam indicate potential cancer). Ideally, get two or more medical opinions if cancer is diagnosed (some insurance companies require more than a single opinion).

The Conventional Approach

Traditional physicians treat BPH with one of two classes of drugs, each of which has the following potential side effects: (1) alpha 1 blockers (e.g., Flomax®, Cardura®) (dangerously low blood pressure, headache, dizziness, stuffy/runny nose, stomach/intestinal irritation) - relieves urinary obstruction by relaxing the bladder neck's smooth muscles; and (2) enzyme (5-alpha-reductase) inhibitors (e.g., Proscar®, Avodart®) (erectile dysfunction, decreased libido, breast enlargement/tenderness) - shrinks the prostate by blocking

the enzyme that converts testosterone to DHT and reducing the number of receptor sites to which DHT can attach. Multiple surgical procedures are also often recommended to reduce prostate size (these generally require hospitalization and can cause loss of sexual function for up to one year, bleeding, and continued urination problems for two months).

The numerous conventional cancer treatments include various types of surgery (including nerve-sparing surgery), radiation, chemotherapy, and vaccine and hormonal therapies, all of which involve risks and numerous recovery challenges.

Natural Approaches to Prostate Health

The nutrients discussed below in order of priority are a few that can help maintain prostate health and are especially indicated if any of the urinary symptoms mentioned above have just begun to develop or are mild. The most supportive natural prostate formulas include all of these (e.g., Life Extension's Ultra Natural Prostate Formula).

Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa serrulata sabal*)

Saw palmetto is a dwarf palm generally found in the southern United States whose red-brown berries have been studied extensively in Europe as a treatment for BPH. It functions like Proscar®, yet can be used with few and rare side effects and no known drug interactions. The recommended dose is 160mg (standardized to 85-95% sterols) twice daily.

Nettle Root Extract (*Urtica dioica*)

For more than a decade in Germany, nettle root extract has been approved for treating BPH. As men age, testosterone converts to estrogen at higher rates. Some unpublished data indicate that nettle root helps support prostate cells, which are

sensitive to estrogen's growth stimulatory effects, against that excess estrogen. Other data suggest that it reduces prostate size by inhibiting the enzyme 5 alpha-reductase. The recommended dose is 120 mg twice daily.

Beta-Sitosterol

Beta sitosterol, the most abundant phytosterol in the diet that is prescribed for BPH in Europe, is found in various plant foods, including pumpkin/sunflower seeds, soybeans, and wheat germ. Although the means by which it reduces BPH symptoms is essentially unknown, animal research indicates that beta-sitosterol may significantly relieve BPH urinary symptoms by functioning like Proscar® and reducing prostate inflammation. Recent studies suggest that this nutrient may also have some direct anticancer potential.

Pygeum (Prunus africana bark)

Twelve double-blind, placebo-controlled pygeum trials support its ability to reduce BPH symptoms. Pygeum bark contains three plant sterols: beta-sitosterol; beta-sitosterone, and campesterol. These components decrease the symptoms of BPH by inhibiting the formation of "bad prostaglandins" (chemical messengers produced by the prostate that affect everything from inflammation to blood pressure) that normally increase as men age. The recommended effective dosage is 50-100 mg twice daily.

Pumpkin/Pumpkin Seed Oil/Omega-3 Fatty Acids

Pumpkin seeds, found highly concentrated in oil form, contain unsaturated fatty acids that have the diuretic effect of increasing urine flow and decreasing urine retention without reducing prostate size. There are also reports that daily use of pumpkin seed oil can lower PSA. The recommended dose is 2000 mg once to three times daily with food.

The correct doses of EPA and DHA, the omega-3 essential fatty acids (i.e., those that the body cannot manufacture) found in the oil of fatty fish (e.g., sardines, salmon, herring, tuna, and mackerel), can help resolve the inflammation underlying all prostate conditions. (Vegetarian flax oil contains only ALA, which must convert to EPA.) Some authorities maintain that GLA, found in evening primrose, black currant seed, and borage oils, is an omega-6 fatty acid that is also a potent anti-inflammatory. The recommended therapeutic dose to enhance prostate health is 1000-2000 mg of EPA and 500-1000 mg of GLA (including that from food).

Conclusion

Nutritional supplements and a healthy diet are part of a holistic approach to prostate health. You can increase your risk of prostate cancer by eating too much, eating too much saturated fat, and taking in too many toxins from food and water contaminants. Supplements cannot take the place of a diet rich in omega-3 and omega-9 (e.g., from olive oil) fatty acids, antioxidant-rich berries (e.g., blueberries, strawberries, goji berries), fiber (e.g., lignans in ground flax seeds/flax oil), and dark green vegetables (e.g., broccoli, spinach, brussels sprouts, and cauliflower). Ideally, if you have, or want to prevent, a prostate condition and wish to incorporate supplements into your daily regimen, seek the guidance of a holistic practitioner whose expertise is informed by extensive clinical experience.

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