

## Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia Strikes Up to 90 Percent of Oldest Men, Can Be Life-Threatening

It's Prostate Health Month and urologist say cancer is not the only thing senior citizens should watch for

Sept. 29, 2008 – Urination problems may be passed off by many older men as just a sign of aging, but that could be a costly mistake. It could be an indication of an extremely common non-cancerous condition, particularly for senior citizens, benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). It hits half of men between the ages of 51 and 80, and up to 90 percent over age 80.

The American Urological Association is raising the awareness of this disease during Prostate Health Month, and pointing out that prostate cancer is not the only condition senior citizens need to know about.

The major symptoms of BPH, including frequent urination, urinating several times at night or difficulty urinating (weak stream, dribbling or the need to push or strain) may seem to be a normal part of aging. However, these symptoms are treatable but, if ignored, can lead to life-threatening complications.

In the majority of men, BPH is a progressive disease. It can lead to bladder damage, infection, blood in the urine, and even kidney damage if left untreated.

“A man should see a doctor immediately if he has: blood in the urine, pain with urination, burning with urination or is unable to urinate,” according to the American Urological Association.

Several treatment options are available for men with BPH. Patients should speak to their doctors in order to determine which treatment option is most appropriate for them.

Treatments include watchful waiting, medications, the insertion of prostatic stents to open the urethra, or minimally invasive surgical therapies.

More about this disease below story...

Editor's Notes:

Link: Diagnosis of Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH)(American Urological Association)

For more information on common prostate conditions or to find a urologist or a free or low-cost prostate cancer screening near you, please visit <http://www.UrologyHealth.org>.

About the American Urological Association: Founded in 1902 and headquartered near Baltimore, Maryland, the American Urological Association is the pre-eminent professional organization for urologists, with more than 16,000 members throughout the world. An educational nonprofit organization, the AUA pursues its mission of fostering the highest standards of urologic care by carrying out a wide variety of programs for members and their patients, including UrologyHealth.org, an award-winning on-line patient education resource, and the American Urological Association Foundation, Inc.

About Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia: A Common Part of Aging

By National Kidney & Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse

(National Institute of Diabetes, Digestive and Kidney Diseases)

It is common for the prostate gland to become enlarged as a man ages. Doctors call this condition benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), or benign prostatic hypertrophy.

As a man matures, the prostate goes through two main periods of growth. The first occurs early in puberty, when the prostate doubles in size. At around age 25, the gland begins to grow again. This second growth phase often results, years later, in BPH.

Though the prostate continues to grow during most of a man's life, the enlargement doesn't usually cause problems until late in life. BPH rarely causes symptoms before age 40, but more than half of men in their sixties and as many as 90 percent in their seventies and eighties have some symptoms of BPH.

As the prostate enlarges, the layer of tissue surrounding it stops it from expanding, causing the gland to press against the urethra like a clamp on a garden hose. The bladder wall becomes thicker and irritable. The bladder begins to contract even when it contains small amounts of urine, causing more frequent urination. Eventually, the bladder weakens and loses the ability to empty itself, so some of the urine remains in the bladder. The narrowing of the urethra and partial emptying of the bladder cause many of the problems associated with BPH.

Many people feel uncomfortable talking about the prostate, since the gland plays a role in both sex and urination. Still, prostate enlargement is as common a part of aging as gray hair. As life expectancy rises, so does the occurrence of BPH. In the United States in 2000, there were 4.5 million visits to physicians for BPH.

### About Prostate Diseases

The prostate is a gland. It helps make semen, the fluid that contains sperm. The prostate surrounds the tube that carries urine away from the bladder and out of the body. A young man's prostate is about the size of a walnut. It slowly grows larger with age. If it gets too large, it can cause problems. This is very common after age 50. The older men get, the more likely they are to have prostate trouble.

Some common problems are

- Prostatitis - an infection, usually caused by bacteria
  
- Benign prostatic hyperplasia, or BPH - an enlarged prostate, which may cause dribbling after urination or a need to go often, especially at night

- Prostate cancer - a common cancer that responds best to treatment when detected early

National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases

More information:

- Prostate Health: What Every Man Needs to Know(Food and Drug Administration)

- Prostate Problems (National Institute on Aging) - Also available in Spanish

- What I Need to Know about Prostate Problems (National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases) - Also available in Spanish

Why BPH Occurs

The cause of BPH is not well understood. No definite information on risk factors exists. For centuries, it has been known that BPH occurs mainly in older men and that it doesn't develop in men whose testes were removed before puberty. For this reason, some researchers believe that factors related to aging and the testes may spur the development of BPH.

Throughout their lives, men produce both testosterone, an important male hormone, and small amounts of estrogen, a female hormone. As men age, the amount of active testosterone in the blood decreases, leaving a higher proportion of estrogen.

Studies done on animals have suggested that BPH may occur because the higher amount of estrogen within the gland increases the activity of substances that promote cell growth.

Another theory focuses on dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a substance derived from testosterone in the prostate, which may help control its growth. Most animals lose their ability to produce DHT as they age.

However, some research has indicated that even with a drop in the blood's testosterone level, older men continue to produce and accumulate high levels of DHT in the prostate. This accumulation of DHT may encourage the growth of cells. Scientists have also noted that men who do not produce DHT do not develop BPH.

Some researchers suggest that BPH may develop as a result of "instructions" given to cells early in life. According to this theory, BPH occurs because cells in one section of the gland follow these instructions and "reawaken" later in life. These "reawakened" cells then deliver signals to other cells in the gland, instructing them to grow or making them more sensitive to hormones that influence growth.

## Symptoms

Many symptoms of BPH stem from obstruction of the urethra and gradual loss of bladder function, which results in incomplete emptying of the bladder. The symptoms of BPH vary, but the most common ones involve changes or problems with urination, such as

- a hesitant, interrupted, weak stream
- urgency and leaking or dribbling
- more frequent urination, especially at night

The size of the prostate does not always determine how severe the obstruction or the symptoms will be. Some men with greatly enlarged glands have little obstruction and few symptoms while others, whose glands are less enlarged, have more blockage and greater problems.

Sometimes a man may not know he has any obstruction until he suddenly finds himself unable to urinate at all. This condition, called acute urinary retention, may be triggered by taking over-the-counter cold or allergy medicines. Such medicines contain a decongestant drug, known as a sympathomimetic. A potential side effect of this drug may prevent the bladder opening from relaxing and allowing urine to empty. When partial obstruction is present, urinary retention also can be brought on by alcohol, cold temperatures, or a long period of immobility.

It is important to tell your doctor about urinary problems such as those described above. In eight out of 10 cases, these symptoms suggest BPH, but they also can signal other, more serious conditions that require prompt treatment. These conditions, including prostate cancer, can be ruled out only by a doctor's examination.

Severe BPH can cause serious problems over time. Urine retention and strain on the bladder can lead to urinary tract infections, bladder or kidney damage, bladder stones, and incontinence - the inability to control urination. If the bladder is permanently damaged, treatment for BPH may be ineffective. When BPH is found in its earlier stages, there is a lower risk of developing such complications.

<http://www.seniorjournal.com/NEWS/Health/2008/20080929-BenignProstaticHyperplasia.htm>