

Enlarged prostate: what treatments are there?

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Only men have a prostate. As they get older, the prostate can get bigger. This can cause problems, such as having to get up at night to urinate. But an enlarged prostate isn't usually a serious health problem. You may choose to wait before deciding to have any treatment. When men suffer from an enlarged prostate, doctors call it 'benign prostatic hyperplasia', or 'BPH' for short.

We've looked at the best and most up-to-date research to produce this information. You can use it to talk to your doctor and decide which treatments are right for you.

What treatments work?

There are several treatments for BPH, including herbal products, medicines and surgery. If you don't find your symptoms too troublesome your doctor may suggest watchful waiting. This means you see your doctor regularly, but you don't have any treatment for the time being.

You can decide to have treatment for BPH at any time.

Medicines

There are two types of medicines for treating BPH. If one type doesn't help you, you may be treated with two drugs, one of each type.

\* Alpha-blockers work by relaxing the muscles in your prostate and bladder. This makes it easier for you to urinate. There's lots of good research to show alpha-blockers help reduce symptoms of BPH by about 30 percent to 50 percent. Your symptoms should start to get better after about two to three weeks. The alpha-blocker usually used for BPH is called tamsulosin (brand name Flomax). Others are alfuzosin (Xatral), doxazosin (Cardura) and terazosin (Hytrin). Possible side effects of alpha-blockers include tiredness, feeling light-headed when you stand up, and headaches. They can also cause dry climax during sex (when you don't ejaculate when you have an orgasm), although this may go away after a while.

\* 5-alpha reductase inhibitors work by blocking hormones that help the prostate grow. But they do not work straightaway. After you have taken one of these drugs for three to six months, your prostate can get about a third smaller. This should make it easier to pass urine. They can also halve your chances of suddenly being unable to pass urine, a condition that needs to be treated urgently, usually with surgery. Drugs in this group are dutasteride (brand name Avodart) and finasteride (Proscar). Side effects can include problems getting an erection, premature ejaculation and dry climax. These drugs can be harmful to unborn babies and babies. Use a condom if your partner could get pregnant or is pregnant. Don't let women who are breastfeeding or pregnant handle the tablets.

## Herbal products

You should always talk to your doctor before trying a herbal extract for an enlarged prostate. You can often buy these over the counter at health food shops and some pharmacies. Make sure you buy from a reputable source. But remember that herbal products are not regulated in the same way as medicines. They are sold as supplements without a prescription, in the same way as vitamins.

Some products contain several different ingredients, including those below. Here's what the research has found about different herbal extracts for enlarged prostate:

\* Good studies have found that saw palmetto can help men with an enlarged prostate. Men say saw palmetto makes their stream stronger and they don't have to get up so much at night to urinate. It may work as well as medicines called alpha-blockers (see below). Saw palmetto can cause mild dizziness, queasiness and headaches.

\* Some research has found that beta-sitosterol can help symptoms. But the improvements may be small and they may not be long term. Beta-sitosterol can occasionally cause upset stomach and erection problems. It is sold under brand names including ModuCare and Natur-Leaf.

\* There is less evidence that rye grass pollen and Pygeum africanum help symptoms caused by an enlarged prostate. They may make you feel nauseous. The most commonly used rye grass pollen product is sold as a nutritional supplement called Cernilton. Pygeum africanum is often sold with other herbs that are thought to help the prostate, such as saw palmetto.

## Surgery

The most common operation used to cut away part of the prostate is called transurethral resection of the prostate, or TURP. It removes the blockage caused by your enlarged prostate, so you can urinate more quickly and easily. Symptoms improve for 9 in 10 men who have this surgery. You may have heavy bleeding into your urine immediately after surgery. But this should pass after a few days. About 2 in 100 get TURP syndrome for a few days after this operation. This can make you slightly confused or queasy, or make you vomit. It can also raise your blood pressure or cause problems with your sight. You also risk getting some other side effects:

\* About 7 in 10 men get dry climax during sex

\* The nerves that control erections can be damaged during surgery, causing erection problems. But some studies show that TURP doesn't cause erection problems

\* About 1 in 100 men need another operation in the future because their prostate gets bigger again.

## Newer types of surgery

There are several operations that are less serious than TURP. These use heat from an electric current, microwaves or laser beams to burn away part of your prostate. Another type of operation is called a transurethral incision of the prostate (TUIP). In this operation, a surgeon makes small cuts where your bladder meets your prostate. This relieves the pressure on your urethra.

These operations may help with symptoms and make it easier for you to urinate. They have fewer side effects and cause less bleeding than TURP. Your stay in hospital will usually be shorter. But there's no research on whether the benefits of these newer operations last as long as the benefits of TURP.

How do I decide which treatment is right for me?

You may want to ask yourself some questions:

\* How bad are my symptoms? If they are affecting your life then you may want to consider treatment. But men with mild symptoms often don't get any worse for many years and prefer to wait to see what happens.

\* Do I want to take tablets every day? You may need to take these for a while before you get any results, and after a few years you may need surgery anyway.

\* Am I happy to try a herbal treatment? If so, you may avoid some of the side effects linked with drug treatments and surgery, although you may get other side effects.

\* Do I want a permanent and quick solution? If you're not happy to wait a few months to see if drug treatment or herbal treatment help, then you may be better off opting for surgery. Also, remember that some men who take drug treatment end up needing surgery. But surgery also has side effects.

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<http://www.guardian.co.uk/lifeandstyle/besttreatments/prostate-enlarged-summary>