

An enlarged prostate is common in older men... ask Mandelson

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Lord Mandelson leaves St Mary's Hospital in Paddington, London, after a prostate operation. When Business Secretary Lord Mandelson was admitted to hospital with prostate problems, it sounded serious. However, not all prostate gland problems are cancerous - most are benign. Here our expert explains about prostate gland enlargement, also called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

Q: Does the prostate enlarge with age?

A: It enlarges as a normal part of the ageing process after the age of 50, although in some men it can be younger. By the age of 70, the majority of men will have an enlarged prostate, but only a third of men over 50 will have symptoms.

Q: What are the symptoms of prostate enlargement?

A: It causes a narrowing of the urethra, the tube carrying the urine out from the bladder, affecting the urine stream such as a poor flow and taking longer to start, as well as dribbling afterwards. Sufferers also need to urinate much more frequently than before, often at night.

Q: Are there any symptoms to worry about?

A: If you have the symptoms above, but also blood in your urine or semen, or pain on urination, you should see a doctor as there may be other problems with your bladder or kidneys.

Q: Is prostate enlargement cancer?

A: No. Those with benign enlargement are no more at risk than other men of developing prostate cancer. Some of the symptoms can be the same but this is a benign condition. Your doctor can distinguish between the two with an examination and blood tests.

Q: What problems can the condition cause?

A: You may get a sudden blockage of urine and the bladder cannot drain. This occurs when the prostate gets too large and effectively closes down the urethra, stopping the urine passing through. This needs emergency hospital treatment to drain the bladder.

Q: Should I have treatment?

A: This depends on how disruptive your symptoms are. The condition does not progress into anything more sinister so we treat it on the basis of symptoms.

Q: Is treatment always surgery?

A: No, there are medications that can shrink the prostate, while others help to control the urinary symptoms.

Q: Are there any alternative remedies?

A: Some of my patients use herbal remedies such as saw palmetto, taken as a food supplement. The plant was originally used by Native Americans to relieve male urinary problems.

Q: What does surgery involve?

A: An instrument is passed up the urethra and part of the prostate is taken away during a TURP - transurethral resection of the prostate.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1209917/An-enlarged-prostate-common-older-men--ask-Mandelson.html>