

Drip, drip, drip

Sssshhh. Men's urination problems are no laughing matter.

THE prostate is a gland of the male reproductive system. The prostate produces some of the fluid for semen, which helps to lubricate the urethra to increase sperm motility. Normally, the prostate is quite small – about the same size as a chestnut. It is located just below the bladder, and wraps around the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside of your body.

Unfortunately, about 75% of men over 50 years old have measurable enlargement of the prostate. This condition is called Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH). An enlarged prostate can be a very serious problem that affects every aspect of a man's life – it can make it difficult to visit friends, dine out, or even see a movie.

Some of the symptoms of an enlarged prostate include: the urge to urinate all the time; the sensation of incomplete emptying of the bladder; disturbed sleep due to night-time bathroom visits; weak urine stream; and dribbling or trickling when urinating

An enlarged prostate appears to be caused by an accumulation of the male sex hormone, testosterone, in the prostate. Once in the prostate, testosterone is converted into a compound called dihydrotestosterone. This is the compound that causes the prostate cells to multiply excessively, causing the prostate to enlarge.

Be very aware that the symptoms of an enlarged prostate may be similar to that of prostate cancer. It is vital to have your symptoms checked by a health professional to be certain they are not caused by prostate cancer.

Some herbs can help alleviate the symptoms of an enlarged prostate. These include:

Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

The fat-soluble (liposterolic) extract of the saw palmetto berry is a natural treatment option for BPH. This extract, when used regularly, has been shown to help keep symptoms at bay. Saw palmetto appears to inhibit 5-alpha-reductase, the enzyme that converts testosterone to its more active form, dihydrotestosterone (DHT). Saw palmetto also blocks DHT from binding in the prostate. Studies have used 320mg per day of saw palmetto extract that is standardised to contain approximately 80% to 95% fatty acids.

Many clinical trials on saw palmetto have been carried out. A three-year preliminary study in Germany found that 160mg of saw palmetto extract taken twice daily reduced night-time urination in 73% of patients and improved urinary flow rates significantly.

Most recent studies have shown that to achieve the optimal benefits with saw palmetto, it is essential that fat-soluble saw palmetto extracts are standardised to contain 85%-95% fatty acids.

Tomato (*Lycopersicon esculentum*)

Lycopene contains phytosterols (a plant chemical), which are responsible for giving tomatoes their bright red colour. Lycopene gets high marks from research for its apparently potent antioxidant properties. Antioxidants can neutralise harmful substances in the body called free radicals (which can contribute to cancer and cardiovascular diseases).

Studies show that high levels of lycopene consumption have been associated with long-term protection of prostate health. When looking for lycopene in a prostate formula, do ensure it comes from tomato extract standardised to contain minimum 5 % lycopene.

Pygeum (*Pygeum africanum*)

Pygeum is the second most popular herb for improving the symptoms of an enlarged prostate. This herb is taken from the bark of a large evergreen tree found in Africa. Pygeum extract contains phytosterols that can inhibit prostaglandin synthesis, thereby reducing the abnormal high levels of prostaglandins normally found in BPH.

Pygeum contains ferulic acid esters which reduce prostatic cholesterol levels, thereby limiting synthesis of testosterone. The extract has an anti-inflammatory effect and hence decreases inflammation in prostate tissues.

Pygeum has been approved in Germany, France, and Italy as a remedy for BPH. Controlled studies published over the past 25 years have shown that pygeum is safe and effective for men with BPH of mild or moderate severity.

Stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

The root of the stinging nettle contains high levels of lignan, which is responsible for the root's ability to bind to sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG), key to its use for prostate problems. As men age, their SHBG level increases, making them more susceptible to enlarged prostates. Stinging nettle has a strong affinity for SHBG, thereby limiting the amount of testosterone and oestrogen than can bind to it and influence cell proliferation.

This extract may increase urinary volume and the maximum flow rate of urine in men with early-stage BPH. It has been successfully combined with both saw palmetto and pygeum to treat BPH in double-blind trials.

Pumpkin seed (Curcubita pepo)

Pumpkin seed extracts contain phytosterols, curcubitin, and selenium. The extract inhibits 5-alpha-reductase, preventing the conversion of testosterone to dihydrotestosterone. It also has an inhibitory effect on aromatase, preventing androgens like testosterone from converting to oestrogen.

Clinical studies have shown that a reduction in urinary frequencies during the day and night-time can be achieved with pumpkin seed. Urinary flow rate is also increased and residual urine is reduced.

Supplement shopping

There are many products for enlarged prostates in the market. Some are in the form of a single herb while others can be found in various combinations. Since saw palmetto, lycopene (from tomato standardised extract), pygeum, stinging nettle, and pumpkin seed extract have been demonstrated through scientific studies to support prostate health, one can look for a supplement which combines these natural extracts to help regulate and improve urination in men.

Practical tips for BPH

·Don't drink too much before bedtime.

·Limit caffeine intake. Caffeine can increase the amount of urine your body produces.

·Go when you need to go – and when you don't. Go to the bathroom as soon as you feel the need. Waiting can stretch the bladder and cause more problems. It's also helpful to use the bathroom when you have the opportunity. This can reduce the chance of urgency emergencies.

·Exercise. Staying active can help reduce your BPH symptoms.

·Practice Kegel exercises. These exercises are designed to strengthen the muscles that help you control urination.

<http://thestar.com.my/health/story.asp?file=/2009/8/30/health/4604856&sec=health>