

Prostate conditions: medical sidebar

Lord Mandelson, the Business Secretary, has been admitted to hospital for a “routine” prostate operation. There are three main prostate conditions that affect men – two of which develop as they get older.

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The prostate is a small gland in the pelvis that is only found in men. It is located between the penis and the bladder, and surrounds the urethra. Its main function is to help with the production of semen.

The main conditions that can affect a man's prostate are: prostate enlargement, prostatitis – inflammation of the prostate gland – and cancer of the prostate.

Prostate enlargement (Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia) is a common condition that is associated with ageing. It is estimated that 60 per cent of men who are 60 years of age, or over, have some degree of prostate enlargement.

If the prostate becomes enlarged by the development of benign (non-cancerous) prostate cells, it can place pressure on the bladder and urethra. This can cause symptoms that affect the ability to urinate including a frequent need to do so, difficulties in doing so and difficulty in emptying the bladder fully. Symptoms can range from mild to severe. BPH is most commonly treated with drugs or surgery.

Prostatitis is a general term used to refer to inflammation or infection of the prostate gland. Symptoms of prostatitis include pelvic pain, pain when urinating and pain when ejaculating semen. Prostatitis can develop in men of all ages and is generally treated with antibiotics.

Prostate cancer is the most common cancer in men. It is responsible for 25 per cent of newly diagnosed cases of cancer in England and Wales and the chances of developing prostate cancer increase as you get older, with most cases appearing in men aged 65 or older.

The causes of prostate cancer are largely unknown but the outlook is generally good despite it being relatively challenging to treat. This is because, unlike many other cancers, prostate cancer usually progresses very slowly. It can take up to 15 years for the cancer to spread from the prostate to other parts of the body, typically the bones. In many cases, prostate cancer won't affect a man's natural lifespan.

Once the cancer has spread to the bones it can't be cured, and treatment is focused on prolonging life and relieving symptoms. Approximately 9,000 men die from prostate cancer every year in England and Wales.

Prostate cancer can be cured when treated in its early stages. Treatments include removing the prostate, hormone therapy and radiotherapy.

Source: [NHS Direct](#).

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