

Surgery isn't only resort for enlarged prostate

By Paul G. Donohue M.D.

To Your Good Health

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DEAR DR. DONOHUE: For men with BPH, would you recommend the Prolieve System for treatment? It involves reducing the prostate with heat. Must it be done periodically to maintain symptom improvement? Any information will be appreciated.

— Anon.

BPH — benign (not cancer) prostate hypertrophy (overgrowth) — is a common condition of older men. The urethra — the bladder's drainage tube — runs through the prostate. A large gland acts like a vise, squeezing the urethra and making it impossible for the bladder to completely empty. Large glands make men get up many times during the night to visit the bathroom. They make it difficult to start the urinary stream, and they can reduce the stream to a dribble.

Minimally invasive procedures, many done right in the doctor's office, pare the gland so that a free urine flow is re-established. The Prolieve System (a trademark name) delivers microwaves to the gland to shave the excess growth. In this and in similar techniques, instruments are inserted into the urethra by way of the penis and passed upward to the level of the prostate gland, where the microwaves are then activated. Yes, I can recommend it. Quite often, the procedure need be done only once. However, it is possible that a repeat will be necessary to trim the gland again should it regrow to the size where it compresses the urethra.

Other procedures include the Green Light laser, in which a laser beam reduces prostate size in a similar manner. TUNA — transurethral needle ablation — is another minimally invasive procedure, done in a like way. It employs radio waves to reduce prostate size. All of these methods work. The most important element in making a choice is the doctor's skill in the technique.

Medicines are another possible route for handling an overgrown gland. Drugs can relax tight muscles in the prostate and in the outflow tract of the bladder to permit

better urine flow. Flomax and Uroxatral are two examples. And medicines like Proscar and Avodart shrink the gland, but they can take months to work.

DEAR DR. DONOHUE: Are homocysteine levels important for me? I had a triple bypass in 1999.

— M.S.

A few years ago, many doctors believed that blood levels of homocysteine were an indication of heart-artery plugging, so lowering them with vitamin B-6, vitamin B-12 and folic acid (another B vitamin) was thought to be a preventive step in keeping arteries clear of buildup. The vitamins did drop homocysteine levels, but they did not improve the odds of staying free of strokes or heart attacks. Enthusiasm for the test's use has waned.

DEAR DR. DONOHUE: My son is married to a woman who has thyroid problems for which she takes medication. I think it is the type where not enough thyroid hormone is produced. He is 32, and she is 34. They have been married for four years. They both want children. Is the thyroid problem preventing them from having children?

— J.J.

It shouldn't. If you are correct and your daughter-in-law takes thyroid hormone in pill form to correct the hormone deficit, then the problem — hypothyroidism — is taken care of. It shouldn't affect her fertility.

Many other thyroid problems exist, so I can't say this with absolute assurance. It depends on her thyroid condition and what kind of medicine she's taking.

DEAR DR. DONOHUE: I have written to you five times about my problem. I am writing again. I need your help.

If I see or hear someone throwing up, I try to get away as quickly as I can. I play the scene over and over in my head for days afterward to the extent that I make myself physically ill. I have had this problem since I was a little girl, but it has gotten worse for me since I am no longer married and my children have grown.

Is this a phobia? Should I seek professional help?

— L.M.

I haven't answered because I don't have an answer. How many times do you witness vomiting? If it's only a few times, you could try to desensitize yourself by visualizing a scene but keeping it in mind for a short time only. Do so day after day.

If, on the other hand, this is something that truly interferes with your functioning, then do see a professional. Your family doctor can put you in touch with one.

Readers may write to Dr. Donohue or request an order form of available health newsletters at P.O. Box 536475, Orlando, FL 32853-6475. Readers may also order health newsletters from www.rbmamall.com.

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