

Prostate Problems

The prostate is a doughnut-shaped cluster of glands located at the bottom of the bladder about halfway between the rectum and the base of the penis. It encircles the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder out through the penis. The walnut-sized gland produces most of the fluid in semen.

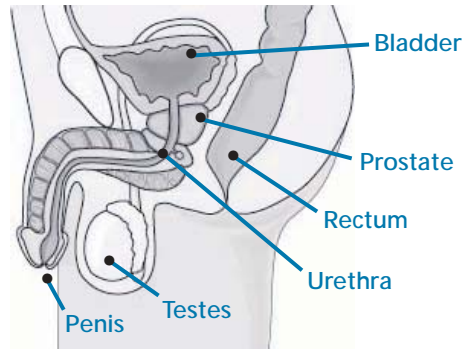
The three most common prostate problems are: prostate infection (prostatitis), prostate enlargement (benign prostatic hypertrophy), and prostate cancer. The first two problems will be discussed here.

Prostate infection (prostatitis)

There are two types of prostate infection, acute and chronic. Acute infections come on suddenly and have some or all of the following symptoms:

- fever and chills
- pain and burning on urination and ejaculation
- strong and frequent urge to urinate while passing only small amounts of urine
- lower back or abdominal pain
- blood in the urine (occasionally)

Symptoms of chronic prostatitis are usually milder than those of an



acute infection, and fever and chills are usually not present. Either infection may occur with a urinary tract infection. See the index of your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook* for more information on urinary tract infections.

Sometimes, men will have painful urinary symptoms without infection. This condition may be called prostatodynia and is often related to stress or anxiety.

Prostate infections usually respond well to home care and antibiotic treatment. If the infection recurs, long-term antibiotic treatment may be needed.

Prevention

- Increase your fluid intake to as much as 8 to 12 glasses per day. You are drinking enough when you are urinating more often than usual. Extra fluids help flush the urinary tract clean.

- Avoid alcohol and caffeine. Caffeine can cause a strong and frequent urge to urinate. Remember that colas contain caffeine as do coffee and tea.
- Keep stress under control. A high level of stress is closely associated with prostatodynia.

Home treatment

- Drink as much water as you can tolerate.
- Eliminate all alcohol and caffeine from your diet.
- Take hot baths to help soothe pain and reduce stress.
- Take aspirin or ibuprofen to help ease painful urinary symptoms.

Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- urinary symptoms occur with fever, chills, vomiting, or pain in the back or abdomen
- symptoms continue for five days despite home care
- there is a sudden change or worsening of symptoms
- you feel pain when urinating or ejaculating and notice a discharge from the penis
- urine is red or pink with no dietary reason

Always call your physician if you have blood in your urine.

Prostate enlargement (benign prostatic hypertrophy)

As men age, the prostate may enlarge. This seems to be a natural process and is not really a disease. However, as the gland gets bigger, it tends to squeeze the urethra and cause urinary problems, such as:

- difficulty getting urine started and completely stopped (dribbling)
- urge to urinate frequently, or being wakened by the need to urinate
- painful urination
- decreased force of the urine stream
- incomplete bladder emptying

An enlarged prostate gland is not a serious problem unless urination becomes extremely difficult, or backed-up urine causes bladder infections or kidney damage. Some dribbling is very common and not necessarily a sign of prostate problems.

Surgery is usually not necessary for an enlarged prostate. Although surgery used to be a common treatment, recent research shows that most cases of prostate enlargement do not get worse over time as previously thought. Many men find that their symptoms are stable and some even clear up on their own. In these cases, the best treatment may be no treatment at all. Drugs are available that may help improve symptoms in

some men. Your physician can advise you on the various treatment options.

Prevention

Since the prostate produces seminal fluid, there is a long-standing belief that regular ejaculations (two to three times per week) will help prevent an enlarged prostate. There is no scientific proof of this, but it is risk-free.

Home treatment

- Avoid antihistamines and decongestants, which can make urinary problems worse.
- If you are bothered by a frequent urge to urinate at night, cut down on beverages, especially alcohol and caffeine, before bedtime.
- Don't postpone urinating, and take plenty of time. Try sitting on the toilet instead of standing.
- If dribbling after urination is a problem, wash your penis once a day to prevent infection.
- Also see "Incontinence" in the index of your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.

Call Kaiser Permanente if . . .

- you develop fever, chills, or back or abdominal pain
- you are currently taking diuretics, tranquilizers, antihistamines, decongestants, or antidepressants, as they can aggravate urinary

problems and other drugs may be substituted

- the symptoms of an enlarged prostate last longer than two months

Early examination enables you to confirm the diagnosis and consider treatment options.

Considering an alternative?



While information is limited, Saw Palmetto may be useful in relieving symptoms of benign prostatic hypertrophy and is also a reasonably safe alternative. For more information, please see the Saw Palmetto patient handout. Also, before treating symptoms, talk with your doctor or other medical professional.

Other resources

For more health information:

- Check your *Kaiser Permanente Healthwise Handbook*.
- Listen to the Kaiser Permanente Healthphone at 1-800-33-ASK ME.
- Visit our Web site at www.kp.org.
- Contact your facility's Health Education Department for books, videos, classes, and additional resources.

This information is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of medical advice or care you receive from your physician or other medical professional. If you have persistent health problems, or if you have further questions, please consult your doctor. If you have questions or need additional information about your medication, please speak to your pharmacist.