



FROM
YOUR DOCTOR

Living with an enlarged prostate

Many men have problems with urination as they grow older. In fact, about half of all men older than 50 may have to go to the toilet frequently during the day and get up at night or may feel unusually strong urges to urinate. In most cases, these symptoms are caused by enlargement of the prostate, also known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

Your doctor can determine if you have BPH by asking questions and doing a physical examination and a few tests. It is very important to remember that BPH is not cancer, and it does not lead to cancer. In many cases, prostate enlargement does not have to be treated at all.

Be sure to let your doctor know about all the medicines you use, including those you buy without a prescription and the ones called herbal medicines. Some of them may complicate your prostate problems, and substitutes may be available.

In addition, you may find that changing certain personal habits will help make symptoms less troublesome (see the tips at left).

If your symptoms are still bothering you, your doctor may suggest trying medicines or surgery. You may have to make important decisions about treatment.

Ask the doctor, for example, to explain how effective drugs are, how long treatment might last, what side effects you might expect, and how much the drugs will cost.

The drugs that your doctor can prescribe are usually helpful. Some may shrink the prostate. Others relax the muscles in the tube that carries urine from the bladder. These medications have only a few side effects.

Your doctor may prescribe one of these drugs and possibly another if the first one is not effective. You may need to stop taking a drug for a while so your doctor can see how you react.

If symptoms are very troublesome, your doctor may send you to a urologist right away for further examination. Or you may be referred to a urologist if drugs do not work for you. The urologist will probably do more testing and perhaps recommend a surgical procedure, depending on your symptoms and your wishes.

Some operations are relatively brief and simple, requiring only a short hospital stay. Others may take more time and call for a longer recovery. You will very likely find that an operation relieves your symptoms, makes you feel more comfortable, and does away with the need to take pills. Be sure to find out in advance what the procedure involves, how long you will be hospitalized, which side effects might occur, how long you can expect the results to last, and how much the surgery will cost.

Above all, remember that you must make most of the decisions. You may wish to do little or nothing if you have only mild BPH. If your symptoms give you a lot of trouble, try changes in your personal life and then drug treatment or surgery.

So be sure to let your doctor know how you feel and what you want done. A good partnership is essential to treating BPH successfully. □

To minimize prostate symptoms:

- Eat dinner early in the evening. That way you have more time to empty your bladder before bed.
- Avoid drinking fluids after 7 PM. This also reduces the load on your bladder before bedtime.
- Take enough time to void completely.
- Avoid excessive amounts of salt in your food.
- Cut down on coffee, tea, cola drinks, or chocolate because they can irritate the bladder.
- Try avoiding spices.
- Cut down on drinking beer, wine, and liquor.
- Check with your doctor before taking over-the-counter drugs for colds or congestion.