

Prostate Problems

Prostate problems frequently occur in men over the age of 50. Fortunately, most problems are not cancer. Even if cancer is diagnosed, the relative five-year survival rate for all men is nearly 100 percent. The most common prostate problem diagnosed in men in over 50 is prostate enlargement, or benign prostatic hyperplasia (BHP). This condition occurs because the prostate continues to grow as a man matures, potentially squeezing the urethra and affecting bladder control. Men under the age of 50 are more likely to experience an inflammation or infection, called prostatitis.

The prostate is a gland about the size of a walnut that is located in front of the rectum just below the bladder. It wraps around the urethra, which carries urine out of the body. The prostate is part of a man's sex organs and is responsible for producing fluid that is part of semen. Regardless of age, men should see a doctor immediately if they notice any signs of prostate problems, such as:

- Frequent urge to urinate
- Having to get up during the night to urinate
- Presence of blood in urine or semen
- Feeling pain or a burning sensation while urinating
- Inability to urinate
- Painful ejaculation
- Urine dribbling
- Recurrent pain or stiffness in the lower back, hips, pelvic area or upper leg

Diagnosing prostate problems may involve several tests, the first of which is usually the digital rectal exam (DRE). During a DRE, the physician inserts a gloved finger into the rectum to feel the prostate and evaluate its size, shape and condition. A prostate-specific antigen test then may be ordered to check whether prostate cells are producing high levels of this protein due to the presence of cancer. A urinalysis may be necessary to detect traces of blood in the urine that could indicate a kidney stone or infection. Magnetic resonance imaging or computed tomography scans can be used to identify abnormal structures. A cystoscopy may be done to see inside the urethra and bladder to determine the location of any blockage. The diagnosis of prostate cancer would be confirmed using a transrectal ultrasound and rectal biopsy.

If BHP is diagnosed, the condition can be managed several ways. Mild symptoms may not require any treatment. However, regular checkups are necessary to make sure the condition does not worsen. Other options include taking medications to shrink or relax the prostate so it does not block the bladder opening or surgery to help urine flow.

Acute prostatitis can start suddenly and cause fever, chills or lower back pain. Another form of prostatitis, called chronic bacterial prostatitis, is an infection that occurs repeatedly. Both may be treated with antibiotics. Chronic abacterial prostatitis is a condition that is difficult to treat and may need more than one round of treatment.

Different prostate problems, including prostate cancer, may cause similar symptoms. That is why it is important to see your doctor to determine if there something wrong with your prostate. For more information about prostate problems, talk with your doctor.