

INTEGRATIVE MEDICAL TREATMENT OF PROSTATE DISEASE

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The most common diseases of the prostate are prostatitis, prostate enlargement, medically referred to as benign prostate hypertrophy, and prostate cancer. While they are different conditions, they do share some common features, especially when we talk about prevention and some of the alternative therapies that can be used to complement conventional medical treatment. True prevention is best accomplished through diet and lifestyle management. The typical American diet that is high in fat and sugar may contribute to the development of all three of these problems. In particular, eating too many of the “trans” fats found in processed foods with hydrogenated oils, as well as the use of too many omega-6 oils like corn, safflower and sunflower without balancing them with the omega-3 oils from fish and flax, seems to contribute to the development of prostate disease. The best diet is one that is based on whole, unprocessed foods with lots of vegetables and fruits using olive oil for cooking or light frying and regular intake of omega-3 fats either through supplements or fish like wild (not farm raised) salmon. This type of diet also provides lots of fiber, which helps in the prevention of other cancers as well as heart disease. Regular use of soy-based foods is also helpful.

The greatest lifestyle strategy for both prevention and treatment of prostate disease is stress reduction. While a large book could be written on this subject, and hundreds have, there are a few important factors to mention. Many men go through life as human “doings,” not human “beings.” Most of our self-worth becomes tied up in what we do, not who we are. This creates a lot of stress and unhappiness as we force ourselves to constantly accomplish what we think we’re “supposed” to do. It is important to find work that is meaningful to us and in addition to take enough time out for ourselves and nurture the other needs that we have. We can start by nurturing our bodies by giving them good food, enough rest balanced by regular exercise, plenty of water, and eliminating destructive habits like smoking, alcohol, and excessive caffeine. If we look closely, we will find that the source of these habits lies in the unhappiness of living in our “supposed to” world.

Benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) is the common enlargement of the prostate that occurs with age. It typically causes problems with urination, especially an increased need to get up at night to urinate. While a number of prescription medications are available to help with the symptoms, numerous non-drug therapies have been shown to be helpful. In general, it can take up to 4-6 months to see improvement with these treatments. One of the most important nutrients for prostate health is zinc. The prostate acts as a reservoir for this vital mineral and can become symptomatic when it is depleted. Unfortunately, it seems that relative zinc deficiency is becoming more and more common in our culture due to high stress, poor diets and the results of commercial farming methods. When taking a zinc supplement, it is best to use it in the form of zinc picolinate or citrate, not zinc oxide which, though cheaper, is very poorly absorbed by most people. Men taking zinc need to balance it with copper, 1 mg. for each 10 mg. of zinc. A good natural way to get zinc is to eat pumpkin seeds on a regular basis, which are also high in essential fats that are beneficial. Several herbal preparations are helpful for BPH. The most well known is saw palmetto, which should be taken at a dose of 160-320 mg. per day. This can be found at most health food and even drug stores. *Pygeum africanum* is another herb that is used but it is in danger of being harvested to extinction. The amino acids alanine, glycine, and glutamic acid when used in combination seem to help relieve swelling of the prostate and some commercial preparations can be found that contain them in combination with the zinc and herbs noted above.

Prostatitis is an inflammation of the prostate that can have several causes. Acute prostatitis is a bacterial infection that causes significant pain and fever and is usually best treated with antibiotics. Chronic prostatitis is a more vexing problem that can be both bacterial and non-bacterial. Conventional doctors will treat the bacterial problem with long-term antibiotics and the non-bacterial variety with anti-inflammatory drugs. Complementary and alternative practitioners are concerned about the possible adverse effects of using these drugs for extended periods of time and feel that other methods be tried first. Here again, zinc supplementation can be very helpful. Nutritionally oriented practitioners can perform a simple taste test to see if a person is functionally zinc deficient. If so, a 3-6 month trial of zinc supplementation should be tried. In some cases, hidden food allergies can play a part and a trial of an allergy elimination diet, which avoids wheat and dairy, and sometimes corn, citrus and eggs, should be considered in anyone who does not respond to other therapies. Another potentially beneficial compound is quercetin, which is a bioflavonoid. In my experience, chronic prostatitis also frequently involves unresolved chronic anger issues concerning self, spouse, parents, etc. These should be dealt with for the best chance at long-term relief, with counseling or therapy if necessary.

The discussion of prostate cancer is a complicated one. Treatment options need to be individualized for each person depending on age, aggressiveness of the tumor and other factors. This discussion should be held with the treating urologist or oncologist. That being said, there are a number of nutritional interventions that have shown promise as complementary therapies for prostate cancer. From a dietary standpoint, the above recommendations still hold. Sugar, alcohol, and fried foods should be avoided. It is probably best to also avoid dairy and red meat. Foods to eat include those mentioned above for other prostate problems as well as seafood, tomatoes (due to their high content of lycopene which may suppress prostate cancer), and green tea which contains compounds called catechins that have been shown, at least in test tube studies, to inhibit a number of cancers including prostate, breast, lung and stomach. Zinc here is just as important as before as is selenium, another vital mineral. Two studies showed decreased rate of prostate cancer in men with higher levels of selenium in their tissues. Saw palmetto may also be useful here but there is some question as to whether it should be used in someone receiving hormone therapy for their cancer.