

The prostate gland is part of the male reproductive system. It is a small walnut-size gland located in front of the rectum and just below the bladder. It wraps around the urethra. The urethra is a tube that carries urine or sperm out of the body.

The prostate gland is important in a man's reproductive years because it makes the fluid that nourishes and protects the sperm. Common prostate problems include:

- Prostatitis
- Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH)
- Prostate Cancer

How are prostate problems diagnosed?

Some prostate problems can be diagnosed by your doctor based on your symptoms, such as changes in urination or pelvic discomfort.

What is prostatitis?

Prostatitis is a general term for a group of symptoms that may be related to the prostate gland and its function, but can also be related to other conditions. It affects men of all ages.

What causes prostatitis?

About 5% of symptoms are linked to a bacterial infection. However, most cases (95%) are nonbacterial and the cause usually can't be determined. Prostatitis isn't life threatening, and it doesn't lead to more serious health problems.

What are some common symptoms of prostatitis?

Symptoms most often associated with prostatitis include:

- Changes in urination, including more frequent urination.
- Pain or burning when urinating.
- Pain during ejaculation.
- Discharge from the penis
- Pelvic discomfort or pain.

Usually these symptoms come and go, and sometimes disappear without treatment. Although these symptoms can be annoying or painful, they won't lead to anything more serious.

What are some of the treatment options?

Prostatitis that is caused by a bacterial infection is treated with antibiotics. However, most prostatitis is non-bacterial and can be treated in a variety of ways.

Some things that might help are:

- Hot baths.
- Prostate massage.
- Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), such as aspirin or ibuprofen.
- Alpha blockers (by prescription).
- Avoiding alcohol and tobacco.
- Pelvic floor relaxation exercises.

What is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)?

As a man ages, his prostate grows larger. This process is called BPH, and is common in men over the age of 50. BPH can affect bladder function, often causing a number of lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) including:

- Frequent or urgent need to urinate.
- Many men find themselves needing to get up several times during the night.
- Trouble starting urination.
- The urine stream is less forceful.
- Feeling like the bladder is not empty after urinating.
- Dribbling after urinating.

Call your doctor immediately if you are unable to urinate and feel painful pressure in your bladder and back, or if you notice blood in your urine.

What are some of the treatment options for LUTS?

There are several treatment options used to relieve these symptoms. Your doctor can explain the risks and benefits of each, and together you can decide which will work best for you.

- Watchful waiting. You and your doctor may choose to wait and monitor your condition.
- Medicine may help reduce some of the symptoms of BPH. There are several types of prescription and non-prescription medicines available. As with all medication, there are possible side effects so be sure to talk with your doctor before taking any new medications.
- Surgery may be a choice if other options aren't possible or effective. Your doctor can help you decide if surgery is right for you.

What about prostate cancer?

Prostate cancer is the abnormal growth of cells in the tissue of the prostate gland. Prostate cancer is common in older men, with most men over 80 having cancer cells in their prostate. However, most men diagnosed with prostate cancer do not die from it.

For more information about screening for prostate cancer, see Group Health's brochure *Prostate Cancer Screening*.

Resources: Where can I get more information?

- The **Kaiser Permanente Resource Line** can provide information on a variety of health topics. Call weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. toll-free 1-800-992-2279.
- Visit the **Kaiser Permanente website** at kp.org/wa and consult the Health and Wellness Resources section for more information on health topics.
- The **Consulting Nurse Service** is available to Kaiser Permanente members with medical questions or concerns. Call 24 hours a day, toll-free 1-800-297-6877.

The information presented in this pamphlet is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care.

Prostate Health

- Prostatitis
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- Prostate Cancer