

# Non-cancerous prostatic diseases – a fact of life?

## *EMHF Fact sheet*

- The prostate gland has been called the most disease-prone organ in the human body. Common conditions affecting it include *benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)* and *prostatitis*
- *BPH* is unfortunately a fact of life for many men. It occurs gradually over a man's lifetime as a result of both enlargement and changes within the muscle tone of the prostate. When these changes happen together, they result in progressive obstruction of the bladder outlet. This causes lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS) of varying intensity
- In the UK alone, BPH affects around 20% of men over the age of 55 years. By the age of 81 years, it is estimated that 38% of men are affected (1)
- Despite its name, BPH is anything but benign. The disease can considerably impair quality of life
- LUTS caused by bladder obstruction include urinary hesitancy, reduced flow, dribbling and incontinence. These effects are frustrating and distressing enough, but the so-called 'irritative' symptoms of frequency, nocturia (getting up at night to pass urine) and urgency can be even more troublesome
- BPH may also lead to sexual problems such as erectile dysfunction, reduced sexual drive and ejaculatory disorders. Psychological difficulties concerning sexual performance may be a particular issue for a man with BPH
- Acute urinary retention (AUR) is an especially feared complication of BPH. This is where an obstructed bladder prevents a man from passing urine. Distressing, frightening and often excruciatingly painful, the condition is a medical emergency. Treatment is by the insertion of a urinary catheter to drain the bladder. However, many men with AUR will eventually require a prostatectomy (surgical excision or reduction of the prostate)
- Prostatectomy may also be offered to men with troublesome symptoms of BPH. Other treatments for the disease include hormone therapy and other medications
- Unfortunately, some of these treatments, which may be highly effective in reducing LUTS, have side effects. For example, reduced sexual function is a concern for many men undergoing surgery
- Estimates of the prevalence of *prostatitis* (inflammation of the prostate gland) vary, but figures of around 8% and 14% of men are commonly quoted. It has also been suggested that the disease may account for around 25% of all urological consultations (2)
- Prostatitis is not often discussed, yet it is the most common male urological condition in those under the age of 50 years. It can affect any postpubescent man

- There are several types of prostatitis. One group of conditions includes those in which bacteria are clinically evident:
  - acute bacterial prostatitis causes chills, fever and pain in the back and genital area. Though the least common type of prostatitis, it is the simplest to diagnose and treat (with antibiotics)
  - in chronic bacterial prostatitis, a persistent bacterial contamination of the urinary tract may be associated with a defect in the prostate gland itself. Again uncommon, this is resolved by removing the defect and treating the infection
- Asymptomatic inflammatory prostatitis, as its name suggests, does not cause obvious symptoms. However, infection-fighting cells may be discovered in the patient's semen when he is being investigated for other reasons – eg testing for prostate cancer
- Chronic prostatitis, also known as male chronic pelvic pain syndrome, is the most common but least understood version of the disease. The condition may be inflammatory (when infection-fighting cells are present) or non-inflammatory. Symptoms may be intermittent, or they may last for a long time
- Chronic prostatitis causes pain, urinary disorders similar to those of BPH, and sexual and reproductive problems. It is notoriously difficult to treat, and men often keep returning to their doctor for help. This often leads to them being labelled as 'heartsink patients'
- Unfortunately, very little progress has been made in the management of this distressing and under-researched disease over the past decades

### Sources

1. Hunter DJ et al. *J Epidemiol Community Health* 1994;48(6):569–575
2. Kirby RS et al (eds). *Men's Health*. Isis Medical Media, Oxford, UK; 1999

### The EMHF: tackling inequalities in men's health across Europe

The EMHF is an independent, non-profit-making, non-governmental organisation that aims to raise the profile of men's health at both a pan-European level and within individual countries. It encourages Europe-wide national, local and regional organisations (both governmental and non-governmental) to include men's issues in their health policies and practices. It also aims to improve delivery of health services to men and to influence men's health-related behaviours.

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