

Benign prostatic hyperplasia

Your treatment options. Your second opinion.



What is benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)

Men can develop a condition affecting the prostate gland called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), also known as 'enlarged prostate'. It may lead to symptoms including urgency to urinate, difficulty starting, a weak, stop-start stream and increased frequency. In some men complications may also develop such as urinary tract infections, bladder stones and reduced kidney function.

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland located just below your bladder. It surrounds the urethra, a tube that carries urine from the bladder to the penis. BPH, which is more likely the older you are, occurs when your prostate grows abnormally large, which may then press on the urethra, interrupting urine flow and leading to bladder problems.

While the cause of BPH still hasn't been found, it's known that it doesn't increase your risk of prostate cancer and only about half of men with BPH actually experience symptoms.

Treatment for BPH

Generally you have four options:

- > Watchful waiting
- > Medications
- > Minimally invasive surgical therapies (MISTs)
- > Surgery

Making a decision on these options may include gathering and weighing up information and your thoughts on how much symptoms bother you, whether complications are present, your fitness for surgery and your personal preferences for treatment.

Watchful waiting

Watchful waiting involves not receiving treatment for now, but having regular check-ups to identify any worsening symptoms or complications. The reasoning is that BPH may often not get worse or develop complications for most men as they get older.

The main advantage of watchful waiting is avoiding the potential side effects of medications and surgical procedures that may never become necessary. It may be an option for men who don't have complications and their symptoms are either mild or they're moderate to severe, but don't excessively bother them.

Medications

The two main medications, which may be taken together, are alpha blockers that aim to reduce symptoms and 5-alpha reductase inhibitors for making the prostate smaller. All medications have risks of side effects. Medications may be an option for men without complications who have moderate to severe symptoms that are hard to tolerate and also for preventing prostate enlargement.

Surgical procedure

If you have moderate to severe symptoms that excessively bother you and/or complications, a surgical procedure may be suggested to you, with the aim of reducing the size of the prostate and opening up the urethra.

Minimally invasive surgical therapies (MISTs)

MISTs are the more recent development in surgical procedures. They're 'minimally invasive' because they don't involve an incision (cut) into your skin and cause less trauma to the body than surgery.

Most MISTs can be done under local anaesthesia. They usually involve inserting an instrument through the opening in your penis into your urethra and up to the prostate, then each MIST varies in the energy source used, such as laser, ultrasound or microwaves, to remove excess prostate tissue.

Lifestyle changes

Lifestyle changes may help reduce symptoms for men with BPH, particularly if you're doing watchful waiting or taking medications. Changes include:

- > Don't drink 1-2 hours before bedtime.
- > Avoid caffeine and alcohol.
- > Talk to your doctor about the negative impact on BPH of medications such as diuretics, decongestants and antihistamines.
- > Go to the toilet when you first feel the urge, because waiting too long may damage the bladder.
- > When you urinate, urinate again a few moments later (double voiding).
- > For severe frequency and urgency, retraining the bladder to urinate at regular times may be helpful.

Herbal remedies

Studies have found no evidence of effectiveness for popular herbal remedies including Saw palmetto, African plum, South African star grass, stinging nettle and rye pollen.

Always consult a medical expert before commencing a course of treatment for any medical condition.





Surgery

The most commonly performed surgery for BPH is transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP), which has been used for many years and may be regarded as the 'standard' surgical procedure.

Usually done under general or spinal anaesthesia, TURP involves inserting two instruments through the opening in your penis into your urethra to the prostate; a small camera (endoscope) and a device for cutting and taking out small pieces of prostate tissue (resectoscope).

Surgery and medical research

When evaluating you for TURP surgery or other options for BPH, your treating medical specialist will take into account many complex factors, including the latest medical research.

Studies have found that TURP may be more effective than watchful waiting for men with moderate symptoms for improving urine flow, but there may be no difference in the development complications such as incontinence (leaks of urine) and urinary tract infections.

Studies have also found that for most men who do watchful waiting, symptoms may not worsen or may even improve over time, medications may help improve symptoms and reduce the need for surgery, but that MISTs may be less effective when compared to surgery for reducing symptoms.

Surgery and risks

Complications following TURP surgery may include blood loss, urinary tract infections, ejaculation problems and urinary symptoms including incontinence, and may be more likely to occur when compared to MISTs.

Understanding these risks is important, particularly given the possibility for many men TURP surgery may not be necessary when choosing the option of watchful waiting or medications, and MISTs may be safer.

Surgery and BPH – the main points

- > If you find it hard to tolerate your urinary symptoms or develop complications due to BPH, you should discuss with your doctor whether transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) surgery is an option for you.
- > If you're considering TURP surgery, take into account the medical studies showing that while TURP may be more effective compared to watchful waiting for men with moderate symptoms for improving urine flow, it may be no more effective for preventing complications, and that for most men who do watchful waiting, symptoms may not worsen or may even improve over time, and medications may be effective for reducing symptoms and the need for surgery.
- > If you're considering TURP surgery, also take into account the research showing that minimally invasive surgical therapies (MISTs) involve less surgical risks, though they may also be less effective.

Would you like a second opinion?

Deciding on a treatment path for a medical condition can be a difficult, complex and stressful question.

Would you like the benefit of an expert second opinion to help you to decide on your treatment options?

If you want to know more about GPS² or have a general enquiry, please contact us on 1800 477 246 or email via contact@gps2.com.au

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