

Benign Prostatic Enlargement

What is the prostate?

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland that forms part of the male reproductive system. It is located in front of the rectum, just below the bladder.

One of its main functions is to squeeze fluid into the urethra during sexual climax. This fluid energizes the semen and makes the vaginal canal less acidic.

The prostate doubles in size around puberty and begins to enlarge again after the age of 25. Constant enlargement of the prostate is a normal part of the male aging process.

This enlargement in later life is known as **Benign Prostatic Enlargement or BPE**.

Why Does BPE Occur?

It is unclear why BPE occurs. However, there are two theories. In his reproductive life, a man produces certain quantities of testosterone and estrogen. As he gets older, the quantity of testosterone reduces and BPE may occur because the estrogen promotes cell growth within the prostate. Another theory suggests that Dihydrotestosterone (a derivative from testosterone in the prostate) controls the growth of the prostate.

Is it a problem?

Most men with BPE have no symptoms. Gradual obstruction of the urethra by the prostate and loss of bladder function cause the symptoms of BPE.

Patients complain of:

- Hesitant, interrupted or weak stream of urine
- Urgency and leaking/ dribbling of urine
- More frequent urination, particularly at night.

Severe cases of BPE can lead to retention of urine in the bladder, which predisposes to urinary tract infections. It can also cause bladder or kidney damage, bladder stones and incontinence (the inability to control the flow of urine).

It is important for every man to have his prostate examined yearly, as the symptoms of BPE may also be the same as the symptoms of Prostate Cancer.

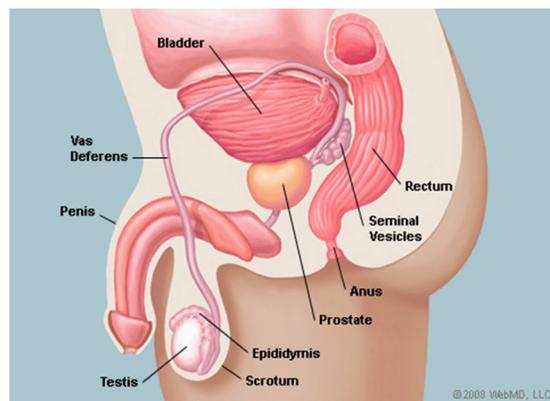
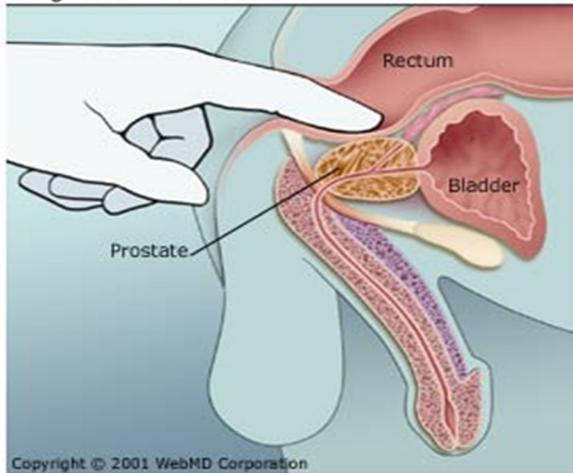


Fig 1: The Male Genitourinary System



Digital Rectal Exam



How is the prostate examined?

The prostate is examined by a DRE or digital rectal examination. A gloved finger is inserted into the rectum to feel the part of the prostate next to the rectum.

A blood test called the **PSA** (Prostate Specific Antigen) is also performed. PSA is a protein produced by the prostate that increases as the prostate enlarges. Its values tend to be elevated in patients with prostate cancer, so it is used as a screening test in conjunction with the DRE.

Problems with BPE are usually managed by a urologist or reproductive health specialist. The urologist may choose to do a **urine flow study** (reduced flow suggest BPE), **cystoscopy** (where a camera is inserted through the urethra to view the prostate) or a **prostate ultrasound scan**. If cancer is suspected, a biopsy sample may be taken.

Treatments for BPE

Drugs: That work at relaxing the smooth muscle of the prostate and bladder neck to improve urine flow.

Surgery: This is aimed at removing the enlarged tissue surrounding the urethra.

The most commonly performed surgery is the **Transurethral Resection of Prostate (TURP)**. This surgery is preferred because there is no external incision made. The surgeon inserts an instrument known as a resectoscope into the urethra. It allows the surgeon to remove the obstructing tissue one piece at a time. The procedure lasts about 90 minutes and has a quick recovery period. An uncommon side effect of a TURP is retrograde ejaculation. This is when semen flows backwards into the bladder at climax instead of out of the urethra.

An alternative to the TURP is the **Transurethral Incision of the prostate (TUIP)**, which widens the urethra and is less likely to cause retrograde ejaculation.

Open surgery is performed when there is bladder damage, or the prostate is too large for transurethral techniques.

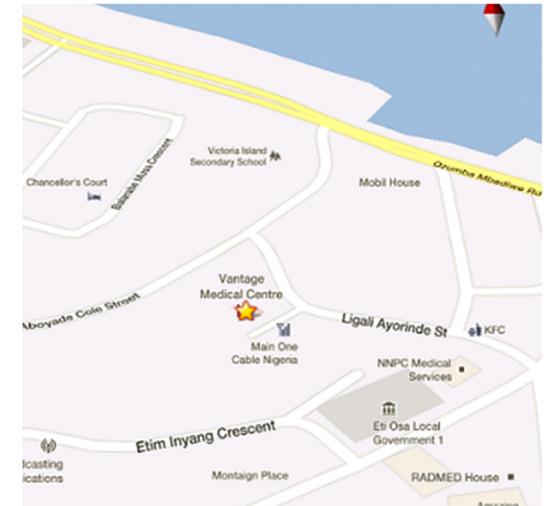
Laser surgery is done via a cystoscope, which delivers large bursts of energy that destroy prostate tissue. It causes less bleeding than a TURP.

Sexual Function after Surgery

Many men are concerned about sexual function after BPE surgery. Complete recovery of sexual function may take up to a year after surgery. It should be noted that this depends heavily on how long after symptoms appeared that the procedure was performed as well as on sexual function before the procedure. Retrograde ejaculation post TURP is also a known cause of infertility. In spite of the above, most men are able to enjoy sex after BPE surgery.

REMEMBER

- Every man over 40 should have yearly prostate examinations
- BPE is a natural part of aging



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