

Prostate Health: Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia and prostate cancer.

In the past few weeks we have had a number of men with prostate issues coming into the clinic, so I felt it was timely to do an article on prostate health. The two most common diseases of the prostate are Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia or BPH and prostatitis.

BPH is a benign enlargement of the prostate gland; a problem common in adult males. This is not exclusive to humans; it is comparably common in other species such as dogs which also have a compact or solid prostate. The first noticeable symptom for many men is an increased need to urinate with difficulty in passing the normal volume of urine. Often there will be “dribbling” and a sense of constriction when urinating.

BPH is usually monitored through two means – a digital rectal examination and the levels of a substance called prostate specific androgen or PSA. Ejaculation has been shown to elevate PSA levels temporarily. If a PSA test is going to be done, it is important that any sexual activity be avoided for 24 hours prior to testing to ensure the most accurate result. Rectal examinations may also temporarily elevate PSA levels, and for this reason the PSA test should be carried out prior to examination, or several hours afterward. Other factors which can elevate PSA readings include recent urinary tract infections and prostatitis which can lift PSA levels to five times normal for up to six weeks, and ironically the drug Finasteride which is used to treat both BPH and prostate cancer.

The traditional non-surgical treatment of prostate disease has focused primarily around reducing the activity of androgens (testosterone) by using either alpha-1 blockers, and drugs or herbs which inhibit a particular enzyme called 5 alpha-reductase. However, in most cases once the treatment is discontinued the symptoms start to re-appear and most patients have to stay on it long term to maintain the benefits.

In the past couple of months I have written about the role of iodine in relation to breast health. Iodine is as important for men as it is for women because of the role that it plays in maintaining good endocrine (hormone) function. What is especially interesting about iodine for men is the research which points to its ability to reduce the symptoms of (BPH) in many men, and the potential for it to change the gene expression in cancer cells in the early stages of prostate cancer and other cancers.

A growing awareness of the importance dietary iodine and the resurgence of iodine deficiency in many Western populations has led to more research being done on this important mineral. It is now being recognized that iodine plays a significant role in many other body tissues and organs, not just in the thyroid gland, and the results of studies on men with BPH and prostate cancer are re-enforcing that both of these issues may have their root in iodine deficiency.

I don't want to bore you with lots of statistics, but I would like to cite a study done recently in the USA on six patients. This was a small study, but was well controlled and similar results have been repeated in other trials. The group of six men all had urinary difficulties related to BPH or to prostate cancer. All were given an oral solution containing iodine and iodide twice daily for ten days. Five of the six men experienced a noticeable improvement in the severity of their symptoms. On further examination, it was found that the sixth man had a constricted neck to his bladder which required surgical treatment, and that this was probably why he hadn't experienced the improvement the other men had.

In another study sixty patients with a variety of cancers were studied. Testing revealed that the common element amongst all of them was a serious iodine deficiency.

Research done on the way iodine changes the gene expression in breast cancer cells has found that iodine works in three different ways. (1) It acts as an antioxidant protector for the fats and proteins in the cell membranes and for the DNA structures. This is an important finding, because cancer occurs when DNA damage takes place. (2) It reduces the ability of abnormal cells to reproduce and survive. (3) It supports correct hormonal balance through the body and normal cell function through its role in producing thyroid hormone which is used by every cell type in the body. It would follow that the effect found in breast cancer would translate into other cancers. Normal cell function equals better cell repair and renewal.

So far the evidence points to iodine and iodide as being a fundamental part in the avoidance of cancerous conditions generally and shows huge potential in the treatment of the same. (I should mention here though, that no mineral works in isolation. If you are considering using iodine, it pays to make sure that firstly, the dose is correct; and secondly, that the other nutrients required to work in synergy with iodine are also present. Remember too, that most supplements have only iodide, not iodide and iodine in them. We have supplements with both forms available).

Diet has long been thought to influence development of prostate (and other) cancers that are common in Western countries and rare in Asia. There is as much as a 10-fold greater occurrence of prostate cancer in the U.S. compared with Japan and other Asian countries. When Asian men migrate to Western countries and adopt a Western lifestyle, the protection gained from their traditional diet begins to disappear within one generation. The key differences between most Asian diets and our Western diet are that the Asian diet contains far less saturated fat and red meat, less refined carbohydrate (bread, cakes, buns, pastry, biscuits etc...), more fermented soy protein, more vegetables and much higher levels of iodine; up to 1.6 grams of dietary iodine daily. The correlation between diet and increased incidence of cancer can't be a coincidence.

If you want to protect your prostate or have prostate disease you would be wise to:

- Eat plenty of fruit and vegetables (cooked tomatoes are particularly good for your prostate). The antioxidants these provide are critical in cancer prevention and have been shown to be helpful in BPH as well.
- Eat more fish and less red meat.
- Avoid fried and fatty foods, especially takeaway foods and potato chips.
- Keep cheese and other foods high in saturated fat to a minimum.
- Eat small amounts of whole grains for fibre like brown rice, oats, rye and quinoa and avoid white flour products.
- Include healthy oils in your diet such as olive, flaxseed, fish or rice bran oils.
- Eat fermented soy products such as soy sauce, miso or tofu but avoid non-fermented ones like soy milk.
- Drink 2 cups of Green tea daily along with plenty of water and limit alcohol to one or two glasses of red wine per week.
- Take a supplement with both iodide and iodine in it.

For men with BPH the herb Saw Palmetto has been shown to reduce PSA levels fairly effectively. However, when use is discontinued the level tends to creep up again soon

afterward. In the tests on iodine, the benefit was shown to last for a more extended period with less regular repeats required.

Where prostate cancer is an issue, it is worth talking to us about specific cancer treatment and support, especially where chemotherapy or radiation treatment are involved. We can do a lot to assist the efficacy of such treatments while helping reduce the side effects.

If you have any queries regarding the information in this article or would like to address some health issues of your own, we encourage you to call us on 06 304 8177. The dispensary is open 9.30am – 4pm Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and 10.30am – 4pm Saturday.