

The Prostate Gland

What is the prostate?

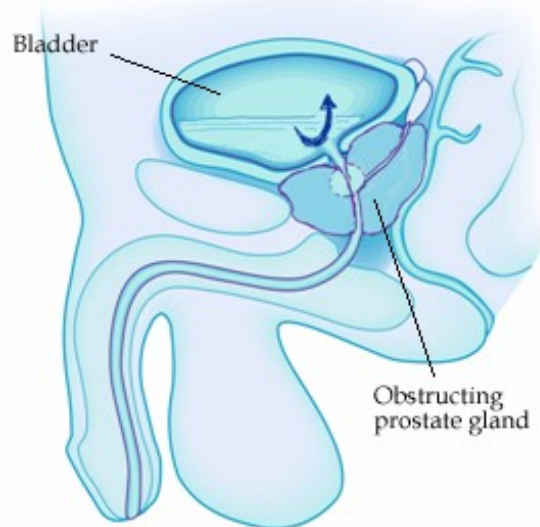
The prostate is a fleshy organ which is wrapped around the neck of the bladder and water-pipe (urethra) like a ring doughnut. It is largely composed of glands and muscle. The prostate glands secrete fluid which makes up about 30% of the total volume of semen expelled at ejaculation.

Why do men get prostate trouble?

In boys and young men the prostate is tiny but for reasons which we do not know it gets larger later in life. The amount of enlargement varies from man to man as do the problems which it causes.

In most men this is an entirely benign process which is so common that it can almost be considered a normal part of getting older. In a much smaller number of men a cancerous growth of the prostate may develop.

Because of its position, the enlarging prostate can obstruct the outlet from the bladder (like tightening a collar) until it interferes with the flow of urine through the bladder outlet (urethra).



How will I know if my prostate is causing trouble?

Sometimes the first thing you notice is difficulty in actually passing water. The flow is slow and it may be troublesome to get started, especially if you have delayed going to the toilet. You can find yourself waiting several seconds for the flow to begin and even straining produces only a feeble dribble. It is often worse at night.

Another sign of prostate trouble is the "sensitive" bladder. The urge to go comes more and more often and the period of warning before passing urine may shorten to such an extent that you find you cannot get there in time. Your sleep is increasingly disturbed by the need to pass water and your activity may be restricted by the need to be in constant reach of the loo.

If the bladder is really full it may overflow at night, so that you wet the bed and it may cause problems by back pressure on the kidneys. You may even get a complete blockage (retention) and need to attend the local Accident and Emergency Department for insertion of a tube (catheter) into the bladder to relieve the problem - a painful and alarming way to find that you have prostate trouble!

What will the urologist do?

The urologist will want to find out the extent of prostate trouble. The story you give and a medical examination will provide a lot of help but most of the useful information comes from a set of routine tests.

These usually include a urine test (to look for infection), perhaps an ultrasound scan (to check how well the bladder and kidneys are coping), blood tests (including *PSA* – *Prostate Specific Antigen*) and a urine flow test to see how fast you pass your water.

When these tests are done the urologist will usually be able to tell you whether you need treatment for your prostate and whether there is any hint of more serious trouble. Sometimes some more complicated tests are needed to give all the answers.

If I do need treatment, what can I expect?

In fact, not all men will require any medical treatment. A significant number of those bothered by their waterworks can gain improvement with simple lifestyle measures including fluid management, the cutting out of fizzy and caffeinated drinks and *bladder training*. For those where the symptoms are not improved sufficiently with such measures, various tablets are available to either improve the outflow from the bladder by relaxing the muscular cells within the prostate and bladder neck, shrinking the prostate over time or by 'slowing' the bladder down.

Will I need an operation?

If your symptoms are severe, the tablets have not worked or having been on tablets for some time things have slowly deteriorated again, the urologist may recommend that you have an operation. The procedure is straightforward and involves 'coring' out a channel through the enlarged prostate gland. The old-fashioned cutting operation has been largely replaced by using tiny telescopes passed through the penis. The most popular operation is called *Trans Urethral Resection of the Prostate* (TURP), which is suitable for all but the largest prostate.

Newer treatments using microwaves and lasers (such as the *Greenlight laser*) have the potential for an even less invasive procedure but with similar outcomes to TURP, with fewer potential side effects and are generally not limited by the size of the prostate gland.



*Greenlight Photoselective
Vaporization of the Prostate*



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