

**Saw Palmetto**

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The prostate is a male gland that secretes the fluid (a part of the semen) which carries sperm from the testicles during ejaculation. The prostate is located just below the bladder and in front of the rectum. It surrounds the first inch of the urethra (the tube through which urine and sperm exit the body). Usually, the prostate gland starts to enlarge after middle age. When the prostate becomes enlarged, the condition is called benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), or benign prostatic hypertrophy.

The prostate gland undergoes two growth spurts: once during adolescence and the other around the age of 50. Though the prostate continues to grow during most of a man's life, the enlargement does not usually begin to cause problems until middle age. About 75 percent of men over the age of 50 and 90 percent of men in their 70s and 80s have had some symptoms of BPH. The benign growth occurs when old cells do not die (as they once did) while new cells continue to grow. This accumulation of cells thickens the prostate, which can narrow the urethra, resulting in urination problems.

**Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*, *Sabal serrulata*) is commonly used in Europe for symptoms associated with benign prostatic hypertrophy.** Although not considered standard of care in the United States, it is the most popular herbal treatment for this condition. Historical use of saw palmetto can be traced in the Americas to the Mayans who used it as a tonic and to the Seminoles who took the berries as an expectorant and antiseptic. Saw palmetto was listed in the United States Pharmacopeia from 1906 to 1917 and in the National Formulary from 1926 to 1950. Saw palmetto extract is a licensed product in several European countries.



Studies have shown that that saw palmetto—extracted from the dark purple berries of the American saw palmetto plant—may help treat benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), the medical name for an enlarged prostate gland. BPH is an overgrowth of cells in the prostate that may be due to changes in hormone levels that occur with age. It affects many men over the age of 40, and more than half of men over 60. BPH is not cancer, nor does it cause cancer. But an enlarged prostate that presses on the urethra (the tube that carries urine from the bladder) can interfere with urination. The first line of treatment is usually a prescription drug. Many people including those of the medical community believe saw palmetto is as good as the drugs for BPH, or even better. Saw palmetto doesn't shrink the overall size of the prostate, but it seems to shrink the inner lining that puts pressure on the tubes that carry urine.

**Symptoms of Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia**

The obstructive (problems with urethra and urination) symptoms of BPH are:

- difficulty initiating a urine stream
- a hesitant, interrupted and weak stream
- urgency and leaking or dribbling

- blood in the urine

As the urethra becomes narrower, the bladder wall becomes thicker and the bladder itself becomes smaller, causing:

- more frequent urination
- bladder irritability
- a sudden strong urge to urinate, especially at night
- urge incontinence - (occurs when bladder muscles are too active. People with urge incontinence lose urine as soon as they feel a strong desire to go to the bathroom.)

If a man suddenly becomes unable to pass any urine at all, this condition is called acute urinary retention and requires medical attention.

The cause of BPH is not well understood, but researchers theorize that BPH could be caused by:

- The aging process
- Testosterone levels - As men age, the amount of active testosterone in the blood decreases, leaving a higher proportion of estrogen. Studies with animals suggest that BPH may occur when a higher amount of estrogen (in the gland) increases the activity of substances that promote cell growth.
- Dihydrotestosterone (DHT) - DHT is a substance derived from testosterone in the prostate, which may help to control its growth. Most animals lose their ability to produce DHT as they age, however, some research indicates that with a drop in blood testosterone level, older men continue to produce and accumulate high levels of DHT in the prostate. This accumulation of DHT may encourage the growth of cells. Scientists have also noted that men who do not produce DHT do not develop BPH.
- Cell "instructions" - Some researchers suggest that BPH may develop as a result of "instructions" given to cells early in life. According to this theory, BPH occurs because cells in one section of the gland follow these instructions and "reawaken" later in life. These "reawakened" cells then deliver signals to other cells in the gland, instructing them to grow or making them more sensitive to hormones that influence growth.

A number of studies suggest that saw palmetto is effective for treating symptoms. Multiple mechanisms of action have been proposed, and saw palmetto appears to possess reductase inhibitory activity (thereby preventing the conversion of testosterone to dihydrotestosterone). Hormonal/estrogenic effects have also been reported, as well as direct inhibitory effects on androgen receptors and anti-inflammatory properties.

Animal studies have shown that saw palmetto inhibits the growth of tumor cells indicating that it may be helpful in the treatment of prostate cancer. Other studies have shown that saw palmetto improves urinary tract symptoms related to BPH. While these studies are promising, more research is needed to determine whether saw palmetto is effective for these conditions.

**Cautions:**

**Pregnancy and breast-feeding:** Saw palmetto is not safe when used during pregnancy or breast-feeding. It acts like a hormone, and this could be dangerous to the pregnancy. Don't use during pregnancy or breast-feeding.

**Surgery:**

Saw palmetto might slow blood clotting. There is some concern that it might cause extra bleeding during and after surgery. Stop using saw palmetto at least 2 weeks before a scheduled surgery.



Some birth control pills contain estrogen. Saw palmetto might decrease the effects of estrogen in the body. Taking saw palmetto along with birth control pills might decrease the effectiveness of birth control pills.



Be sure to try NSP's [Saw Palmetto \(100 caps\)](#) or [Saw Palmetto Concentrate \(60 caps\)](#). [Click Here](#) for a list of NSP products containing Saw Palmetto.

### References

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Sincerely,

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