

## Overcoming the fear of age-related prostate problems

How new treatment and early diagnosis can tackle one of the most feared problems among men.

As we get older the chances of developing health problems increase. For men, some of the most feared age-related problems are those associated with the prostate – such as benign prostatic hyperplasia or prostate cancer.

This fear often leads many men to ignore significant symptoms and delay consulting a doctor. However, modern technology has brought advances in the diagnosis and treatment which not only bring better results but also shorten the length of stay in hospital.



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The prostate gland is one of the major male reproductive organs and produces the seminal fluid which mixes with sperm to form semen. It is located under the bladder surrounding the urethra which carries urine from the body.

As men get older, the size of the prostate often increases, as a result of benign prostatic hyperplasia. Research has shown, the probability of getting benign prostatic hyperplasia is at 35% for those aged between 41 and 45, but increases by 10 to 20% with every subsequent 10 years.

Symptoms of prostatic hyperplasia include the need to go to the toilet more frequently or difficult urinating. These symptoms may not appear too significant at first, but if ignored, may lead to acute urinary retention, hematuria (blood in the urine) and bladder stones, or even kidney failure.

### Diagnosing and treating prostate problems

Today, doctors use “International Prostate Symptom Score” (I-PSS) and “Uroflowmetry” to assist in managing benign prostatic hyperplasia. This I-PSS comprises seven questions related to urination to evaluate the severity of prostatic symptoms by quantifying them; while the “Uroflowmetry” uses specific instruments to measure the rate of urine flow.

The most common surgery for treating prostatic hyperplasia is the “Transurethral Resection of the prostate (TURP)” which was first performed in Hong Kong some 30 years ago. This involves removing obstructive hyperplastic prostate tissue using a special wire loop. Electric current was employed for cutting and coagulation. The result is remarkable but does carry the risk of complications such as urinary incontinence and bleeding, although a more recent development using lasers has reduced the postoperative bleeding to a significant extent.

A more recent technological advance is “Plasma Vaporization of the Prostate”. This technique creates a plasma zone around the vaporizing electrode which removes the obstructive prostate tissue by turning them into gas bubbles at a high speed. This treatment is effective and has a lower risk of complications such as bleeding, and also reduces the time of hospital stay when compare to traditional surgery.

### Blood test offers early detection in fight against cancer

A much more feared problem is that of prostate cancer, which is now one of the top four common male cancers, affecting three times more men in Hong Kong today as it did 30 years ago.

Early prostate cancer carries few or no symptom at all. As the disease progresses, patients may experience difficulty or pain during urination, bladder distension or bone pain. As a result many men fail to consult doctors and are only diagnosed in the later stages.

This is why doctors recommend men aged over 50 years old undergo a “Prostate-Specific Antigen” (PSA) blood test. A score of four or under on the PSA index warrants observation, while anything higher indicates the need for further tests.

If the cancer is localized, curative treatment can be done with radical surgery or by radiotherapy. Traditional surgery involves a midline incision below the umbilicus, whereas minimally invasive laparoscopic surgery or robot-assisted laparoscopic surgery are also currently widely practiced. Unfortunately if the cancer has spread, the strategy for therapy shall involve tumor suppression with hormonal therapy. Radiotherapy and chemotherapy are further used to supplement hormonal treatment failure.