For many men, there is nothing more vexing than benign prostate hyperplasia, commonly known as BPH. Additionally, the specter of prostate cancer looms for any man approaching middle age. In fact, if a man's brother has prostate cancer, his own risk of the disease is 50% higher. As it is, prostate cancer affects one in six American men, and the risk for African-American men is twice as high as it is for Caucasian men.

There are strong botanical ingredients that can help balance hormones, reduce inflammation, relieve the symptoms of BPH, and protect the prostate from the potential development of cancer. These amazing herbs and compounds are the focus of this Terry Talks Nutrition®.

Prostate enlargement is nothing unusual. It is the most common prostate concern for men from ages 45 to 74, and half of all men in their 50s have some symptoms. By the age of 80, up to 80 percent of men are dealing with BPH.

The reason an enlarged prostate affects the urinary flow is because this organ surrounds the urethra (the tube through which urine drains from the bladder out of the body). As the prostate enlarges, it doesn’t just grow outward, but inward, too – squeezing the urethra and slowing the flow of urine. When men feel like they have a slow stream, have to go often, or need to get up at night several times to go the bathroom, they may very likely be dealing with BPH.

While there are synthetic drugs available to address this problem, they also come with a lot of side effects.

And, unfortunately, PSA screenings that look for elevated prostate-specific antigen levels – usually requested when men feel that their symptoms might be the sign of something more serious – aren’t always accurate or reliable. They may result in a “false positive” – indicating the possibility of cancer that isn’t actually there - starting men down a road of treatment that they truly don’t need. Fortunately, if you have concerns about prostate cancer, or simply want to get away from the symptoms of BPH, nature has a better way. After all, just because BPH is common, doesn’t mean you have to feel it is inevitable.

**Saw Palmetto**

Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens) is probably one of the best-studied botanicals for prostate support. One of the reasons that saw palmetto is so well-regarded is because of its ability to balance hormones.

One of the primary culprits in prostate enlargement is a derivative of testosterone called dihydrotestosterone, or “DHT”. It’s normal for men’s hormone levels to change over time, but too much DHT can cause an imbalance leading to prostate problems. Saw palmetto has the ability to stop this potential problem in its tracks and help recover a natural balance of hormones. It does this by inhibiting the enzyme 5-alpha reductase, which in turn, prevents the creation of DHT. Saw palmetto also prevents the binding of DHT to androgenic receptors, which can also lead to enlargement of the prostate.

Saw palmetto extract also has anti-inflammatory ability, blocking COX-2 and 5-LOX pathways. Not only does this help reduce some of the swelling of the prostate, but it also fights the inevitable cellular damage that occurs because of inflammation.

Multiple studies and clinical trials have used saw palmetto, whether on its own vs. a placebo or drug, or as part of an herbal combination. One year-long trial involved 47 men with BPH, aged, on the average at 53 years old. At the end of 3 months, the group taking saw palmetto extract reduced their symptom score and noted an improvement in their quality of life. Those are two big considerations for anyone looking for relief from symptoms, but not looking for the side effects of synthetic drugs. Over the course of the study, the maximal urinary flow rate for men taking saw palmetto improved as well.

Another study found similar results – both objective (urinary flow) and subjective (quality of life) measures – improved for men aged 52 to 78 years old using an extract of saw palmetto.

And an overall review of the most important clinical studies and scientific literature found that most of the published trials truly show that saw palmetto significantly improved urinary flow in men with BPH. It also acknowledged that saw palmetto works on many fronts – as an anti-inflammatory, anti-androgenic (hormone balancing), and an anti-proliferative, all important for keeping prostate growth in check.

**Boswellia**

Boswellia (Boswellia serrata) is one of my favorite herbs. It is a specific inhibitor of 5-LOX, an enzyme that activates leukotrienes, which induce inflammation. Active key compounds in boswellia, called boswellic acids, are responsible for its anti-inflammatory and cell-protective abilities. The most active of the boswellic acids is known as AKBA (Acetyl-11-keto-B-boswellic acid).

In fact, I can’t overestimate the importance of that enough. Studies published in the journal Cancer Research in the past few years show the strong association between AKBA and tumor inhibition.

One of the studies found that AKBA specifically suppressed prostate tumor growth by preventing the formation of blood vessels that feed the aberrant cells. Another found that it not only kept tumors from growing, but actually encouraged the body to activate a programmed cellular death pathway for prostate cancer cells.

But not all boswellia products are created equal. Some unstandardized boswellia products contain very little AKBA, with levels as low as 1%. To make sure you get the best, look for boswellia standardized to at least 10% AKBA. Also, researchers found that one of the boswellic...
Acids, called “beta boswellic acid,” is actually pro-inflammatory, which is clearly something you want to avoid when dealing with either BPH or concerns about cancer.

The best products are purified and the beta boswellic acid is filtered out to less than 5% of the extract. Unstandardized products can be as much as 25% beta boswellic acid, so it’s crucial to know what to look for!

Nettle
Nettle (Urtica dioica) is usually the last plant that people would instinctively think of for reducing inflammation, much less prostate and tumor growth, but this botanical is another must for anyone concerned about their prostate.

Nettle is rich in beta-sitosterol, a plant sterol that I discuss in depth just a bit further on in this article. It has hormone-balancing effects, so like saw palmetto it reduces prostate growth and the symptoms of BPH. It does this by inhibiting the binding of sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG) to the prostate, and by inhibiting aromatase, an enzyme that affects the body’s steroid metabolism. Nettle also has anti-inflammatory properties that also help reduce the growth of prostate tissue.

Additionally, nettle extracts have been shown to inhibit adenosine deaminase (ADA) activity of prostate tissue. Normally, ADA activity helps the body process purines, but ADA activity around the prostate may create cell growth and tumor activity. Research using cells from patients with prostate cancer showed that nettle extract inhibited ADA activity. It may prove to be one way that the botanical helps prevent tumor growth and support the prostate.

Other research has shown that nettle inhibited tumor growth by as much as 30%. It is a very powerful ingredient and one that should be part of a strong prostate health formula. The nettle I recommend is a strong 10:1 extract.

Beta-Sitosterol
Phytosterols (or “plant sterols”) are commonly called “the fat of plants.” Of the phytosterols, the one you’re most likely to consume is beta-sitosterol. As well as nettle, it is also found in peanut butter, legumes, pistachios and other foods.

Once absorbed in the digestive tract, beta-sitosterol is metabolized in the liver and travels to the other tissues in the body, including the prostate.

However, if you have experienced urological problems and suspect it is BPH, you’re not going to get enough of this valuable plant sterol through your diet alone.

Double-blind clinical studies have found that beta-sitosterol improves urinary flow for men with BPH, and that is big news. After all, urinary issues are one of the most common complaints for any man who feels like he must constantly go to the restroom, or who feels like his bladder doesn’t fully empty after each trip.

Aside from the positive effects of beta-sitosterol for BPH, there is newer research that shows it may inhibit prostate and breast cancer cells. Additionally, beta-sitosterol may encourage T-helper cells and modulate our immune response. So overall, this is an excellent botanical resource to have on board when you’re dealing with prostate concerns – and want to support your health in general.

The structure of beta-sitosterol is going to be the same regardless of the source. One of the most pure sources of beta-sitosterol that I’ve discovered is actually from pine. This may seem unusual at first, but this pine phytotherapeutic source can be standardized for 70-80% beta-sitosterol, an impressive amount.

Sesamin
The sesame plant has been cultivated for over 6,000 years. Like many of our most valuable herbal ingredients, sesame was revered as both a food and a medicine, being used throughout the Mediterranean and India. There is a reason these plants are so valuable, and many of our most advanced studies are still finding out exactly what mechanism makes them effective.

A recent study from M.D. Anderson, where groundbreaking research is being done on preventing cancer and stopping tumors with curcumin and boswellia, shows that sesamin, a key lignan from sesame seed (Sesamum indicum L.) also inhibits tumor growth.

Sesamin is a powerful compound with a long history of use, and has been shown to block the activity of a protein complex called NF-kB, which promotes the growth of tumor cells. While BPH and cancer are two very different things, inflammation and prostate growth that prevents proper urinary flow are certainly related. And, as I’ve mentioned before, inflammation along with oxidation is one of the primary causes of all diseases, from arthritis to cancer. Under the duress of inflammation, the protein complex NF-kB, promotes the growth of tumor cells. Sesamin inhibits NF-kB, and the inflammation that attracts cellular misfiring in the first place.

While the researchers at M.D. Anderson found that sesamin blocks the activity of NF-kB, they also found that it had a positive effect on multiple tumor cells, including leukemia, colon, breast, pancreas, lung and prostate cancer. Plus, sesamin had positive effects for a variety of cancer factors; tumor cell proliferation, inflammation (inhibiting COX-2), cell growth, and invasion. Like the other ingredients in this combination, sesamin has far-reaching potential well beyond BPH and prostate health, and is worth keeping in mind for anyone’s health regimen.

Five Must-Have Botanicals for Prostate Health
Dealing with prostate health issues – whether the natural fact of BPH as you get older, or the possibility of prostate cancer – can be difficult. If you have concerns about prostate health because of your family history, are experiencing symptoms of BPH, or simply want to provide the must-have nutrients to keep healthy, I believe these five botanical ingredients are the best you could choose.

Terry recommends a product with these ingredients.

Proprietary Blend 1,010 mg
Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens) Berry Extract standardized >85-95% fatty acids, Boswellia (Boswellia serrata) Gum Resin Extract standardized to contain >70% Total Organic and Boswellic Acids with AKBA >10%, with less than 5% beta-boswellic acids, Nettle (Urtica dioica) 10:1 Root Extract, Pine Phytotherosterols standardized to contain >70-80% beta sitosterol, Sesame (Sesamum indicum L) Seed Extract standardized to contain >60% sesamin and >70% total lignan content.

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