

# Prostate: prostatitis

## What is prostatitis?

*Prostatitis* is inflammation of a man's prostate gland, which is a gland about the size of a walnut that lies just beneath the bladder. There are two main types of prostatitis—acute and chronic. Acute prostatitis, which is more severe, develops suddenly and makes you feel quite ill because of infected pus in the gland. In chronic prostatitis the onset is slower and the symptoms, which are milder, tend to drag on or come and go and linger indefinitely. It is not contagious.

## What is the cause of prostatitis?

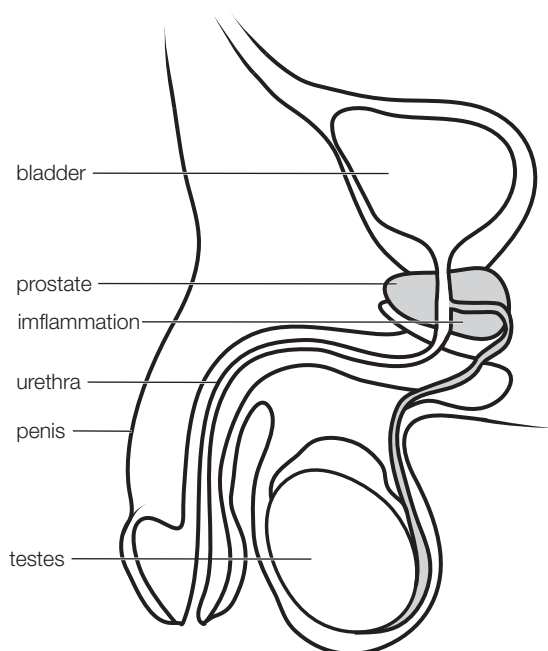
Prostatitis is usually caused by infection from the common bacteria associated with urinary tract infection. The bacteria that live in the bowel may travel up the urethra and cause cystitis (infection of the bladder) or prostatitis or both. Some conditions that cause obstruction to the flow of urine commonly predispose to prostatitis. This particularly applies to older men with an enlarged prostate. Damage to the prostate such as following surgery to the prostate is also an important cause. Sexually transmitted infection is an uncommon cause.

## What are the symptoms?

In the acute attack you usually feel very sick with a high fever and chills (like having the flu) and pain in and around the penis which may be felt around the scrotum, anus and lower back.

Symptoms common to both acute and chronic prostatitis are:

- painful (stinging or burning) urination
- frequency of urination with waking to urinate at night



- urgent need to urinate
- urinary irritation
- difficulty starting urination
- poor urinary stream
- painful ejaculation of semen.

Occasionally the symptoms can be mild and almost imperceptible. Blood may be seen in the urine.

## What tests are usually done?

Your doctor will examine your prostate by feeling it with a gloved finger in the rectum. A specimen of urine will be taken to test for infection and look for bacteria to work out the best antibiotic to treat it.

## What are the complications?

Prostatitis may lead to infection elsewhere in the urinary tract such as in the bladder, testicle and kidney. Rarely the infection can get into the bloodstream causing septicaemia. It can also fester and develop pus as an abscess which may require surgery. If not treated, it can cause a fistula.

## What is the treatment?

- *Rest.* It is important to rest if you are feeling feverish and unwell.
- *Pain relievers.* Take regular analgesics such as ibuprofen, paracetamol or aspirin to relieve pain and fever (if present).
- *Antibiotics.* Your doctor will prescribe a course of antibiotics if the cause is bacterial infection. This is usually required for 6 weeks.
- *Ample fluids.* It is important to drink lots of water—a minimum of 2 litres of water daily to keep up a good flow of urine.
- *Diet.* Avoid caffeine, particularly coffee, reduce alcohol to a minimum and avoid spicy foods
- *Intercourse.* Continue as usual; it is not harmful and evidence indicates that moderate sexual activity helps.
- *Hot baths.* Sitting in a tub of hot water (salt can be added) is good especially if pain extends to the anus.
- *Avoid constipation.* Keep the bowels regular by a good diet or stool softeners (laxatives) if necessary.

## What is the outlook?

Prostatitis is usually curable with the above treatment, especially if a full course of antibiotics is taken. However, recurrence can be a problem.