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Herb profile

# Saw palmetto

A good herb for men

Terry Willard, ClH, PhD



Men at a certain stage of life need to know that saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens* or *Sabal serrulatum*) is effective in reducing an enlarged prostate gland, the condition referred to as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH).

As men age, more male hormones such as testosterone collect in the prostate. This testosterone, in turn, converts into dihydrotestosterone (DHT), a more potent form that causes the cell multiplication that eventually enlarges the prostate. In one out of eight cases, enlarged prostate leads to prostate cancer, but always if left untreated.

The fatty acids in saw palmetto have been shown to prevent the conversion of testosterone into DHT and inhibit male hormone binding to cellular and nuclear

receptor sites. Saw palmetto also increases the breakdown of DHT already present in the body.

Saw palmetto is by far the most popular herb noted for complaints related to BPH. Eighteen randomized controlled trials involving 2,939 men have shown it was effective in reducing the size of the prostate in 80 to 90 percent of men treated, and in a very short time (usually 30 to 90 days).

Besides the direct effect on the prostate, saw palmetto has a gentle and strengthening effect on the entire male reproductive and urinary systems. In

addition, saw palmetto is anti-inflammatory (reducing prostaglandins and leukotrienes). Saw palmetto's polysaccharides have shown immuno-stimulant activity, even though the specific active ingredient that triggers this activity has yet to be identified. It is most likely a combination of several

cure. I suggest all men over the age of 35 take 30-day courses of the capsules from time to time, depending on age and health condition. After age 35, men should do a 30-day course every two to four years. Men over age 40 should do a 30- to 60-day course every year. Men over age



factors, primarily saw palmetto's fatty acids, contributing to an effect on immune activity.

No significant side effects have been associated with saw palmetto, although some minor gastrointestinal upset is possible. Saw palmetto has been shown not to change male hormonal levels on a broader systematic basis and it does not interfere with prostate-specific antigen (PSA) testing, the medical test for monitoring prostate health.

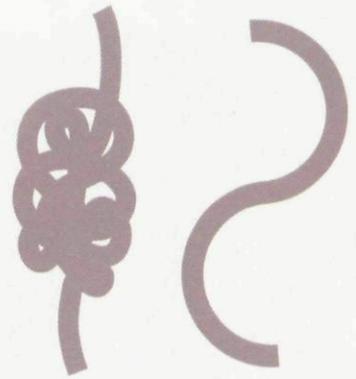
It is important to note that this herb should be specially prepared in an oil-soluble form such as a tincture or soft gel capsule. The normal protocol I use for the prostate is one or two soft gel capsules (or 20 drops of tincture) two to three times daily. This therapy lasts 30 to 120 days, depending on the severity of the problem.

Of course, prevention is the best

50 should do a course of 45 to 90 days every year.

Benign prostatic hyperplasia can be effectively treated using saw palmetto. It has been demonstrated to be more effective and less expensive in most cases than either surgery or modern pharmaceutical treatment. While more research is needed in our understanding of the development and treatment of BPH, it seems that the future of saw palmetto and other herbals offering relief for this painful and worrisome ailment is bright. **a**

Terry Willard, ClH, PhD, is a practitioner, teacher, director of the Wild Rose College of Natural Healing in Calgary, and author of *Mind-Body Harmony* (Key Porter, 2003).



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