

Acu News

"A man grows most tired while standing still." - Chinese Proverb

TCM & Prostate Health

If you noticed more facial hair on men during the month of November, it's not just because they are preparing for winter. Many men grow a beard and/or mustache for what's now recognized as "Movember", an annual charity event that takes place each November, to raise awareness for men's health issues such as prostate cancer.

The prostate is a walnut sized gland that sits at the base of the bladder surrounding the urethra. During ejaculation the prostate secretes a fluid that invigorates the sperm and also prevents infection in the urethra. Over time hormones weaken and the prostate enlarges. Swelling of the prostate can put pressure on the bladder and urethra affecting the flow of urine, leading to some of the common symptoms associated with prostate issues.

An enlarged prostate (also known as BPH: Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia) is a common issue for men, especially over the age of 50) and not directly associated with prostate cancer, though there can be similar etiologies, at least from a Chinese Medicine perspective.

Typically, in TCM, the main patterns that are found in men with prostate enlargement are kidney-deficiency, and 'qi and blood stasis in the lower burner' which can lead to 'damp-heat'. The kidney deficiency is related to aging and the decline of sexual function and sex hormones. The kidney deficiency can contribute to the decreased circulation of blood and energy in the lower abdominal/reproductive area, known as the 'lower burner'. This stagnation can allow pathogens or toxins to accumulate, setting up an area of inflammation or 'damp-heat'.

Similarly, in prostate cancer, this combination of deficiency and stagnation can lead to congestion of harmful energy

Warning signs of prostate issues:

- Frequent/urgent urination
- Difficult urination
- Weak or interrupted flow
- Painful/burning urination
- Painful ejaculation
- Blood in urine/semen
- Pain/stiffness in low back/hips/upper thighs (in combination with other symptoms)

in the prostate, which, unchecked, can progress into an even more concentrated condition of excess known as toxic-phlegm. Tumors, in general, according to TCM are related to this buildup of toxic-phlegm in the body.

While treatment in Western Medicine differentiates mainly based on the prostate issue being benign or cancerous, Chinese Medicine treatment also differentiates based on the pattern of imbalance. Some people presenting with a prostate issue may have more of a deficiency: with symptoms such as: fatigue and dull achy low back pain, while others present more of the qi and blood stagnation, with irritable moods and more stabbing pain. Others may show signs of dampness, heat or even toxicity, with a thick yellow or even green coat in the back of their tongue. A skilled Chinese Medicine practitioner can recognize overlapping patterns and navigate a correct course of treatment. Of course, for patients actively treating cancer with Western approaches such as chemotherapy and radiation, acupuncture can play a supportive role and help mitigate side effects of conventional treatment. In a large retrospective study in Taiwan, prostate cancer patients who used complementary TCM treatments had significantly decreased mortality.

Prevention of prostate issues in Chinese Medicine is all about preserving kidney qi and promoting qi and blood circulation while avoiding environmental toxins through healthy living. Getting adequate rest and regular exercise in balance is essential. Managing stress can not be over-emphasized as emotional frustrations are one of the main internal causes of stagnation. Avoid processed, pesticide-loaded foods while including some prostate-supportive foods like seeds (especially pumpkin seeds), mushrooms and berries. Various herbal formulas are used, depending on the presentation. Some herbs that may be included are Reishi mushroom (Ling Zhi), known for its general health and immune promoting qualities, and Phellodendri Cortex (Huang Bai), an herb used to 'clear damp-heat from the lower burner'.

If you're concerned about your health and well-being, schedule your next acupuncture session to address any issues or simply maintain a healthy system to prevent problems in the future.

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