

Prostrate vs. Prostate: *Prostatitis, Part I*

Dear Dr. Mass:

In 1985 I was diagnosed with chronic prostatitis after becoming involved in my first and only long term relationship. I went from urologist to urologist and tolerated a lot of insults about my sexual preference. One of them told me that I had to stop having anal sex, which I did for 14 years. Now, some people are saying that anal intercourse massages the prostate and is good for it. What do you think?

B.W., Carlisle, Penn.

We gay men pride ourselves in being savvy about sex. We're not like some of our straight brothers who still don't know their asses from the proverbial hole in the ground, who still don't want to admit that their assholes are just as erogenous as everybody else's, or that it's the prostate- not the prostrate--gland that they feel getting massaged when their girl friends stick their fingers, dildoes or fists up there. When I refer to the prostate gland, most of this readership will know what it is and what it does. I don't think anyone among you is going to imagine that prostates are hustlers. In fact, most of you will have done more digital (finger) exams of other men's prostate glands than most physicians, including - for some of you record holders, I'll bet - some urologists!

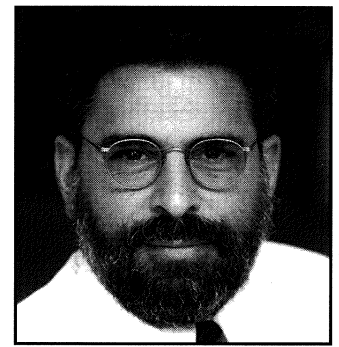
There are basically four big categories of conditions affecting the prostate that we need to be concerned about. Two of them are more common in younger men: acute and chronic prostatitis; the other two in older: benign prostatic hypertrophy and cancer of the prostate.

But why should we bears care

about the latter two if they are mainly diseases of older men? Well, in case we haven't noticed, that's one of the things that distinguishes our community. Many of us are older. I say we because when I wrote my chapter on *Bears and Health* for Les Wright's forthcoming Bear Book II (and excerpted in *American Bear* last year), I wrote that a lot of the health problems bears encounter are those of the overweight. Well, I should have added that another broad category of health issues our community can expect to face are those associated with ageing. I'm 53 and one of the things I love about the bear world is that there are so many of the kind of men I'm most attracted to: guys my own age, older, and younger ones who look like we did when we were younger, and who, like us when we were younger, appreciate us more mature (cough) types. So, unlike the buff/party circuit cultures, we boast a lot of middle-aged guys, a lot of whom, when it comes to our prostate glands, are like me: apart from the rectal exam we might get by our doctors on our annual physicals, we keep hearing stuff about these prostate problems - enlargement and cancer - in older men but never think about how it might actually relate to us and how we should be trying to keep on top (cough) of this major area of men's health.

Prostatitis

The prostate is a walnut-size gland that is wrapped around the urethra. It's made up of glandular and muscular tissue. It's mainly involved in the production of semen, which is clear and which



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we recognize as precum, when it's not all milky white from the sperm it accompanies during ejaculation, or cloudy from infection. When you see a word with the suffix "itis," it's referring to inflammation of that gland. So an inflammation of the liver (hepar) is hepatitis and of the prostate is prostatitis.

There are 3 major categories of prostatitis: acute infectious, chronic infectious and chronic non-infectious. The first two refer to prostatitis that is caused by infectious organisms (e.g., bacteria, fungi, viruses), and may be treated with antibiotics. The cause(s) of the latter is not known. Prostatitis is not known to be sexually or otherwise transmissible. Although most bacterial prostatitis is caused by E. Coli, the most common fecal bacteria, it is not known to be acquired from fucking ass without a condom. You are at higher risk for prostatitis if you have an abnormal urinary tract or have had urologic procedures involving the insertion of instruments into the urethra. Of course, we know that the latter practice is not always limited to the urologist's office...