

# Yoga and Diet for Prostate Health

A comprehensive guide to a healthier prostate

The Prostate Gland is a bloke thing. It is one of the organs in the urinary and reproductive system of the body. It is a male sex gland made up of a cluster of smaller glands which surround the urethra and a portion of the bladder. It's to be taken seriously fellas.

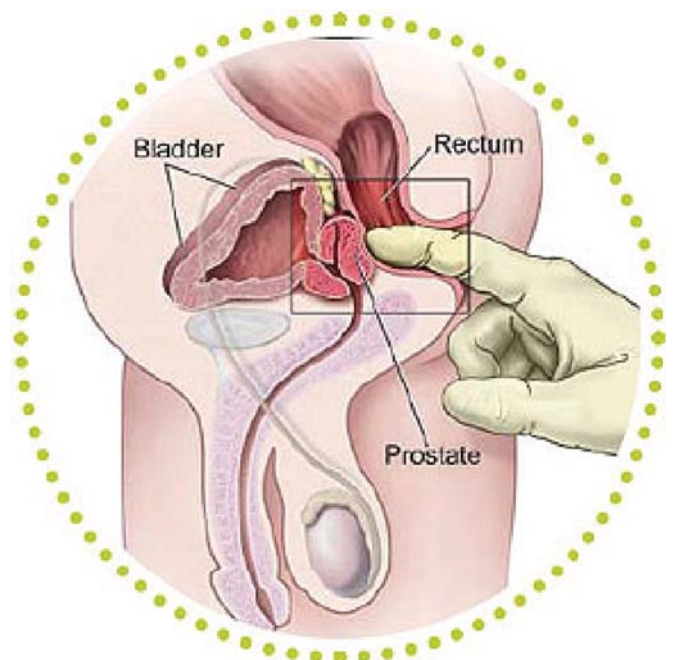
This mysterious gland is small, doughnut shaped, and situated at the base of the bladder. It causes more grief to men than just about any other part of their bodies, and prostate cancer will soon be the major killer of men in Australia. Although approximately 50% of Australian men may experience some type of prostate problem at some stage of their lives, until it plays up, men rarely give their prostate a second thought – not a good idea.

Its main function is during the sexual act – when ejaculation occurs, it secretes an alkaline fluid that forms part of the semen. This fluid nourishes and provides volume to the semen, along with other seminal fluids.

Walnut sized in young men, enlargement of the prostate is common in men over 50 and approximately 4 in 10 men over the age of 60 have it. Enlargement occurs when the glands and connective tissues surrounding the urethra thicken and block urine flow.

Prostate enlargement causes

**1. Ageing.** As the body ages, harmless nodules develop in the tissues of the prostate, which accumulate and gradually enlarge the gland. Eventually the gland becomes large enough to 'press' or 'strangle' the urethra and obstruct urination.



**2. Low levels of zinc.** The tissues of the prostate gland normally have high levels of zinc. Zinc levels gradually decrease as you grow older.

**3. Over 50 testosterone levels start decreasing.** This causes an increase in the quantity of dihydrotestosterone (DHT), which over-produces prostate cells.

**4. Postural faults and obesity could also affect prostate health.** A heavy body and lengthy periods of sitting put more pressure on the pelvic region and perineum, resulting in congestion in and around the prostate.

**5. Constipation can also be a cause.** Hardened faeces and an overloaded rectum cause excessive pressure on the prostate gland.

## Prostate problem symptoms

1. The obvious one is difficulty in passing urine. This is due to compression of the urethra by the prostate blocking the flow. You may strain or have to wait a while before being able to go.

2. A weak flow of urine starts, and then stops. The stream is narrower and less powerful.

3. Involuntary leakage – there may be a tendency to dribble urine, much like incontinence.

4. One may find it difficult to stop urination once it has started.

5. You visit the bathroom more often. There may be a frequent need or urge to urinate 2 or 3 times nightly, as well as during the day.

6. Even after passing urine, you're still left with the feeling of incomplete emptying of the bladder.

7. Due to prolonged obstruction, the small veins in the bladder and urethra stretch. When you strain to urinate, the veins may burst, causing blood to enter the urine. Due to this, painful urination, called Dysuria, may occur.

8. There could be a mild pain in the lower back, hips and legs and occasional impotency.

Basically, symptoms are very similar to those experienced by women who have weak pelvic floor muscles. Both reflect a weakness in the muscles around the genitals, bladder and reproductive organs as well as a weakness around the perineum or Root Chakra/Mulabhandha.

## Diet & vitamins support

The importance of the trace mineral zinc in maintaining prostate health is paramount. Zinc is essential for prostate gland and male hormone function. It is known as the 'male mineral' and is required to produce sperm and seminal fluid. A deficiency may cause impotency and infertility.

It has now been well established that there is a link between prostate health and the zinc content in prostate tissue.

## Diet guide

- Maintain a low-fat diet and watch your cholesterol levels.
- Include Omega-6 and Omega-3's that help regulate nervous system function.
- Bake, steam, stir-fry or make salads instead of deep-frying.
- Choose low-fat over full-cream milk and make it organic if possible.
- Avoid fat-filled salad dressings and rich sauces that agitate the liver and heart.

- Drink eight glasses of water daily - Green Tea is also beneficial for the prostate.
  - Increase your daily intake of fibrous foods, fresh vegetables and fruits, particularly red and red-orange ones, and increase your Vitamin C, A, B6, E, cod liver oil and flaxseed oils.
  - Check whether your intake of Vitamin D is adequate – this includes down-time to rest in the sun and allow your mind to unravel with meditation, music or power-naps to help reduce your stress levels. Stress is a major contributor to imbalances on all levels of being (body, mind, emotional and spiritual).
  - Avoid spicy (in Yogic Ayurvedic terms these are called 'rajasic') foods that can increase body heat, digestive fire and agitate emotions.
  - Watermelon seeds have natural diuretic properties which help prevent excess build-up of urine.
  - Avoid or minimize alcohol intake. Try not drinking for a few days and then reintroduce it. After just a day you should notice whether it makes the urine symptoms better or worse. This is because alcohol constricts the bladder neck, and hampers urination that can lead to a restless mind and body.
  - Avoid decongestants and antihistamines that alter the body's natural elimination process.
  - Avoid smoking and smoky environments. There is some evidence that (as well as all the other negative health results!); cigarette smoking indirectly affects the size of the enlarging prostate. This could be because constricted blood vessels throughout the body affect how much oxygen and nutrient rich blood flows to the organs and extremities.
  - Avoid coffee, tea, caffeinated soft drinks and chocolate. Some men find that prostate problems are made worse with caffeine because the neck of the bladder is constricted by increased caffeine levels. Again, try the elimination approach.
  - Include zinc in your diet: zinc has been shown to improve urinary symptoms and reduce the size of the prostate, and can therefore be effective in preventing and reversing prostate enlargement. Vegetables high in zinc include dried beans, garbanzos, black-eyed peas, lentils, peas, beets, cabbage and whole grains. Additionally, pumpkin seeds, oats, whole wheat and rye.
- \* Add Selenium, Evening Primrose Oil and the Amino Acids daily – glutamine, alanine and lysine in particular - to maintain healthy cardiovascular and nervous system function.

## How Yoga can help

Yoga connects all systems and energies throughout the body and enhances blood quality, respiratory function, regulates hormone production and flow, digestion and elimination, as well as helping balance and calm the mind and emotions. Yoga can strengthen, release and balance simultaneously, and give men the mental challenges they need depending on the sequences, agility and focus needed. Poor circulation can exacerbate prostate issues. Regular yoga practice can increase blood flow, deepen the breath and release neuro-muscular knots to tone and nourish all cells, organs, joints and tissues. Any congestion or blocked prana/chi/energy will then disperse to restore wellbeing so we feel more aligned, more as nature intended.

Yoga also helps give men a sense of exertion with calmness rather than agitating their systems. This is particularly good because it allows men to connect with their softer side and explore aspects of their emotions that they may not necessarily do in a power aerobic or boxing class – without having to sacrifice or subdue their masculinity! Men can learn to acknowledge and appreciate their inner voice by being on the mat, and after time, may even begin to explore and express what is inside more often, and with more confidence.

Yoga is about creating unity between your mental, emotional, psychological and spiritual selves – the physical benefits are just a bonus. Asana (postures) is what we do in order to sit and meditate comfortably with a still, undistracted mind. It's not about being a flexible pretzel or proving how much longer you can hold a pose than the person beside you – something men especially tend to forget when the voices of competition and ego bark loudly in their ears!

By bringing particular awareness to the perineum or Root Lock/Base Chakra that governs instincts, behavior, confidence and blood quality, prostate symptoms, and the sense of feeling unsupported, may be relieved. Once awareness is established, you then work into strengthening and governing energy through the Base Chakra which will restore power through the spine and help men assert their masculinity in a confident yet calm way.

Here are 6 great Yoga postures (safe for beginners) that will improve prostate health –

**1. Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose)** - increases blood supply to the pelvis, kidneys, prostate and bladder, and brings awareness and energy into Mulabhandha/Root Lock.

\* Sit upright on a blanket with soles of feet together, knees wide. Interlace fingers around outer edge of toes, focus on lengthening the spine and lifting the chest on each inhalation, and relaxing shoulders and tailbone downwards on each exhalation. Do against a wall for support if difficult. Draw energy up through your perineum (small point between anus and genitals) as you breathe to contact Mulabhandha. Engage abdominals slightly and lift through the spine to stimulate and cleanse digestive and reproductive organs.

**2. Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog)** – strengthens the arms & legs, lengthens the spine, opens the chest and lungs and strengthens the heart. An excellent all-rounder pose!

\* Start on all fours, hands under shoulders with fingers spread, knees under hips, toes tucked under. Exhale and lift buttocks up as you move your chest back towards your thighs as the legs straighten. Neck is relaxed, ears in line with upper arms, keep knees bent if hamstrings and lower back tight. Hold and breathe as you press down firmly into all knuckles of the hands and lift kneecaps into thighs whilst drawing heels to the floor. No tension in the face. Keep abdominals active and broaden across the chest, moving the armpits towards each other. Rest in child's' pose, head to mat, arms down by your side and buttocks on heels for a few breaths after.

**3. Bhujangasana (Cobra Pose Variation)** - knees bent with feet pointing up to ceiling - this variation contacts the kidneys more deeply and helps with hormonal flow. Also helps to stimulate production of all male hormonal fluids by directly stimulating the bladder, kidneys and sex glands.

\* Lay on your belly, hands beside chest with fingers spread, forehead down. Legs hip width apart, start to press pubic bone and tops of legs and feet into the mat and draw shoulders down from ears and elbows in towards each other. Inhale and slowly lift chest off mat, keeping arms close to ribs with elbows bent and shoulders down. Hold where comfortable for a few breaths and press pubic bone, navel and legs firmly into mat. Don't come up so high that your back jams or your arms straighten. Look to floor so neck stays long and expand chest and lungs as you lengthen your spine from pubic bone to crown. Rest with head to one side after, arms by side and legs relaxed.

**4. Supta Padangusthasana - (Reclining Big Toe Pose)** - relieves backache, stretches hips and hamstrings and opens the lower back so energy can flow along the kidneys and through bladder meridians.

\* Lie on your back, bend one knee to chest and other leg stays long, feet flexed. Place strap around ball of bent leg foot and straighten upwards. Keep shoulders relaxed and arms straight, chin drawn to throat gently. Hold and breathe, feeling the hamstring/achilles and belly connection. When you exhale press the waist to the mat and lengthen further through both legs. Raised leg does not need to be vertical but it does need to be straight. Hold for a few breaths then release and swap sides.

5. Paripurna Navasana (Boat Pose) - tones the kidneys, abdominals and strengthens the lower back. Keep feet on floor or hug knees to chest as you balance to switch belly on.

\* Sit on your buttocks and hug knees to chest. Start to balance on your sitting bones and lift your toes off the floor, feeling your belly engage. Gradually begin to lift your feet with shins parallel to the floor, feet flexed, leaning back 30-40 degrees and lift the chest, arms reaching out to the feet and parallel to the floor as well. Keep breathing, working the Mu-labhanda and drawing all your strength into your centre. Hug knees to chest after a few breaths.

6. Virasana (Seated Hero Pose) - Meditate in this position to finish your practice. Excellent for calming and centering the mind and digestive fire. Focus on drawing up Mulabhanda. Alternative is Savasana (Corpse Pose) for mediation.

\* Lay on your back, legs long, arms by your side and head supported with a blanket if need to. Rolled blanket under your knees and an eyebag or cover over the eyes. Relax completely and focus on your breath, releasing all joints, muscles, organs and then the skin, to the earth in surrender and peace. Stay for at least 5 minutes and then roll to your side and curl up in a ball before coming up and finishing.

Practice daily, 20 minutes should suffice, gradually build up to longer by holding poses for more breaths, and pay attention to your breathing, how you feed yourself and what you choose to hold onto in life. Only stretch within a range of motion that is free of sharp pain.

The best time to meditate is after your asanas, on an empty stomach, and preferably at sunrise or sunset.

In summary it's no surprise that in the West we experience some of the highest statistics for prostate (and breast) cancers. Why? For me, perhaps we place too much emphasis on the body and associated material paraphernalia, when instead we could be focusing on connecting and honoring, not only our own spirit and potential, but each other's as well. Maybe if we reversed our thoughts and began living from a positive space more often, stopped to feel and appreciate the earth beneath our feet, an earth that gives us what we need, we could reduce those statistics and replace them with high self-esteem, vitality and chronic happiness! Are we brave enough to imagine, let alone create, such a world?

It all starts with us as individuals and that is why yoga is such an effective therapy. On our mats we are all equal, we all have the same bodies, we feel the same sensations and we recognize our failings and triumphs in the person practicing beside us. Yoga makes us feel, breathe and embrace. It makes us laugh at ourselves (something I think we don't do enough of) and ignites our compassionate, human nature. And with that kind of power burning inside of you, dis-ease will have a hard time staying alight.

## Conventional treatment

If you think you have prostate problems, don't assume you do, it's very important to have it checked out by your GP. A digital rectal exam (DRE) and, or urine and blood tests, will confirm whether or not you have Benign Prostate Hyperplasia (BPH) or other prostate problems, and an ultra-sound test can be done to check for prostate cancer.

Some great online resources can be found at:

[www.prostate.org.au](http://www.prostate.org.au) and [www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Prostate\\_Cancer](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au/topics/Prostate_Cancer)

And of course, the best treatment is PREVENTION.

Be well!

Namaste.

Denby Sheather is a Yoga Instructor, Bowen Therapist and Reiki practitioner. She runs Breathing Space Yoga Studio and can be contacted at [www.breathingspaceyoga.com.au](http://www.breathingspaceyoga.com.au)