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Views and insights on Golf & Medicine

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***[As seen in regional & national
golf publications coast to coast]***

GO WITH THE FLOW

Imagine you're in the middle of the 18th fairway after a perfect drive, needing just a bogey to shoot your career-best round. You're doing all the right things – taking deep breaths, living in the moment, and focusing solely on the shot at hand. You're completely target oriented, and fully entrenched in your pre-shot routine. Then, it happens – you unpredictably and suddenly experience the intense urge to urinate. Not only can't you ignore it, you can't even wait until after you hit this shot!

You quickly run behind a group of trees, but now the moment is gone. The group behind you is waiting anxiously on the tee and your routine has fallen completely out of synch. You proceed to pull your approach shot into a deep bunker short of the green. It takes you two shots to get out of the sand, followed by a three-putt for triple bogey, and you miss *even tying* your previous career best. Devastated, you silently curse yourself for putting off seeing your doctor for these *exact* symptoms, which you've been experiencing now for several months.

If you're male, you may be suffering from *benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH)*, also called *benign prostatic hypertrophy*, or enlargement of the prostate gland. The prostate's function is to secrete fluid which becomes part of the sperm-containing *semen*. Normally the size of a walnut, the prostate is located just below the bladder and in front of the rectum, surrounding a portion of the *urethra*, the tube which carries the urine (and semen) to the outside world.

It continues to grow throughout most of a man's life, but the prostate generally doesn't start causing problems until later in life. Between 50-75% of men over the age of 50 have had symptoms of BPH, while as many as 90% have symptoms by the time they're 75. As the prostate becomes thicker, it squeezes the urethra, causing it to narrow. As you would imagine statistically, many of Champions Tour members have likely suffered with the symptoms of BPH.

As the prostate grows and the urethra tightens, men commonly experience the following urinary symptoms:

- difficulty initiating urination
- a weak, often interrupted stream/flow
- urinary urgency, often with leaking/dribbling
- bloody urine

As the process continues, if not treated, the bladder itself can eventually become thicker and smaller, causing even more frequent urination, bladder irritability, and the strong, sudden urge to urinate (see example above). Experienced primarily at night, it can also happen anytime and can cause men to actually lose urine as soon as they feel the urge. Occasionally, *acute urinary retention (AUR)* occurs, the complete inability to pass any urine at all. Unfortunately, this requires a trip to your local ER to have a catheter placed, for that ultimate feeling of relief!

If you're having these symptoms, it's important to visit your doctor to discuss them, and determine if you're suffering from BPH or another health problem. After taking the medical history to determine the severity of the

symptoms, your doctor will (and should) perform the dreaded *digital rectal exam (DRE)*, to access the size of the prostate and check for any abnormal lumps or bumps. A urine test will be checked, along with blood tests checking your blood sugar, kidney function and a *prostate-specific antigen, or PSA*.

The PSA test is approved by the FDA as a prostate cancer screening tool in men over the age of 50, or sooner if there's a strong family history of early prostate cancer. PSA levels normally increase with advancing age. Although BPH and prostate *cancer* are *not* the same thing, it *is* possible to have both simultaneously. But, BPH does *not* increase your chances of developing cancer, and your PSA can be elevated for reasons other than cancer. But, if your level is elevated for your age, your doctor will likely refer you to a urologist for further evaluation.

The treatment for BPH depends very much on the degree of symptoms you're experiencing. If the symptoms are deemed *mild*, a period of "watchful waiting" may be in order, without drugs or other intervention. In this case, your doctor will likely recommend the following lifestyle adjustments:

- maintain an adequate water intake (8 glasses per day), but cut down on fluids in the evening
 - decrease your intake of caffeine-containing drinks
 - avoid over the counter cold remedies that contain *pseudoephedrine* and/or *antihistamines*
 - use laxatives or other means to avoid constipation, which can aggravate your urinary tract
 - hot baths
 - avoid prolonged sitting, as possible – get up and move around
 - sometimes, cranberry juice, to increase the acid levels in your urine
- And here's one piece of good news – regular *ejaculation* can reduce the symptoms of BPH as well! You can use your imagination here.

If you're experiencing *moderate* symptoms, pharmaceutical intervention is likely indicated. There are a variety of medications on the market, some of which relax the prostatic-urethral muscles, thereby improving flow. Others actually help shrink the prostate gland. One of these, *Avodart*, is now even an official marketing partner with the PGA and Champions Tours. Many physicians also recommend the use of *Saw Palmetto*, an herb found to reduce symptoms of BPH.

Finally, if your symptoms become *severe*, you may be a candidate for *invasive* techniques, either surgical or non-surgical. The non-surgical techniques include procedures such as *transurethral microwave thermotherapy (TUMT)* and *transurethral needle ablation (TUNA)*. Surgical procedures include *transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP)*, *transurethral incision of the prostate (TUIP)*, and *prostatectomy* (removal of the prostate). Though new surgical alternatives are being developed, TURP is still the most common. There are significant risks and benefits to *all* treatments for BPH, so discuss them at length with both your personal physician and urologist.

So, if you're having symptoms of BPH, *don't* ignore them – "go with the flow!" Untreated, it can eventually pose other health risks -- and may even ruin your career round!

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