



Epilobium and Your Prostate

by L. Stephen Coles, M.D., Ph.D.

Prostate enlargement, also known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), is one of the leading health concerns of men today and affects about half of all men in their lifetime to one degree or another. A healthy, normal-sized human prostate gland is slightly larger than a walnut. However, it is situated in such a way that it completely surrounds the urethra (the flexible tube that carries urine from the bladder to the outside world). Because of the unusual location of this gland, as it enlarges, it can squeeze down on the urethra, making urination difficult and the flow intermittent. This may result in a sense of urgency, but only a slight trickle of urine may actually stream out. So the need for urination becomes more frequent, and one has to wake up more often in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. Sooner or later, this constriction will not only impede the flow of urine, it will completely block it due to "strangulation," inflicting serious abdominal pain as the bladder expands to its upper limit.

Men's prostate concerns also raise serious questions about how to help this condition. As a medical doctor with a focus on complementary and alternative medicine, I have come to the firm con-

clusion that, unless the condition is life threatening, men are far better off using a nutritional or herbal approach to prostate health—and I recently was made aware of a new men's health herb that I want to introduce you to. It is called epilobium and is available as Prolobium™ from MRM. It's important for you to know about Prolobium, even if you are now using saw palmetto, and particularly if your doctor is telling you to go on medical drugs and your condition is not in any way life threatening. That's partly because I have become quite concerned over the side effects of many of the drugs that patients are being prescribed today. Among the most popular prescription drugs for the treatment of BPH are Flomax (tamsulosin) and Proscar (finasteride).

SIDE EFFECTS OF PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Controlled clinical trials of Proscar have revealed side effects in a large number of men. In the Proscar Long-Term Efficacy and Safety Study (PLESS)—a four-year controlled clinical trial—3,040 male patients between the ages of 45 and 78 with symptomatic BPH and an enlarged prostate were evaluated for safety over a period of four years. In the first year alone, up to 18 percent of men on the drug suffered impotence, decreased libido, and decreased semen volume. In another study, there were four cases of breast cancer in men treated with Proscar but none among those men not using the drug. Additional studies have confirmed these serious side effects. No wonder women are further advised to not even touch the drug if there is any chance whatsoever they will become pregnant.

When patients specifically request help for prostate problems, doctors frequently recommend saw palmetto, but epilobium might be superior, as we recognize that saw palmetto doesn't work for all men and epilobium has independent positive effects on male hormone balance. Furthermore, according to the *Physicians' Desk Reference for Herbal Medicines* (3rd Edition), there are no observable side effects for epilobium. As a doctor interested in the best medicine for patients, Prolobium's epilobium represents a great benefit-to-risk ratio.

THE HISTORY OF EIPILOBIUM

Epilobium is by no means a brand new herb. It has been celebrated for its health successes throughout Europe for decades; it has just recently been

“rediscovered” as a potent treatment for a variety of male and female maladies. Attention was originally focused on epilobium for its beneficial effects regarding prostate health for men, and urinary-tract health for women. The use of epilobium (from the family *Onagraceae*) was widespread in Central and Eastern Europe as well as in certain areas of North America for centuries to treat these conditions. Numerous epilobium plant species have been used as remedies in folk medicine, particularly in Central Europe, for the treatment of prostate disorders and abnormal growths. Epilobium consumed as a tea was first recommended by the Austrian herbalist Maria Treben for men suffering from prostate abnormalities. Furthermore, epilobium has been and continues to be the subject of numerous studies throughout Europe. Upon further study, it was learned that it is more potent than saw palmetto and has similar, yet more powerful, effects for blocking dihydrotestosterone (DHT), the commonest cause of enlarged prostate and also of male-pattern hair loss.

In traditional herbal medicine, epilobium has been proven to have antibacterial, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, and antioxidant properties. It has been used successfully for bladder health maintenance, male health maintenance, hormonal imbalances, and urinary-system health. Certain species have been identified as particularly effective in inhibiting the enzyme 5-alpha-reductase and for serving as an anti-inflammatory compound.

SEVEN EUROPEAN STUDIES CONFIRM THE MECHANISM-OF-ACTION OF PROLOBIUM

Researchers from the Department of Pharmacology at the Medical University of Warsaw studied aqueous extracts of *Epilobium angustifolium* and its main component *Oenotherin B*, a dimeric macrocyclic ellagitannin, and found that they were specifically able to induce a neutral endopeptidase (NEP), thereby inhibiting the proliferation of human prostate cells. This result may partly explain the effectiveness of epilobium extracts after centuries of empirical folk medicine. Other researchers located in the Department of Pharmacology of Natural Substances and General Physiology at the University of Rome have studied epilobium as a treatment for BPH and also found that it inhibits proliferation of human prostate cells. The selectivity of this effect was evaluated in four different human cell lines in culture. These studies provide

us with some initial biological plausibility for the use of epilobium extracts in BPH. At the Institute of Pharmacology at the University of Graz in Austria, investigators worked with rats to verify these findings. Finally, at the Center for Research ROUSSEL UCLAF at Roumainville, France, several extracts from *Epilobium parviflorum* were evaluated in a biochemical assay with 5-alpha-reductase. The aqueous extract displaying inhibition of the enzyme was analyzed, the fraction responsible for this activity was purified, and the active compound was identified as a macrocyclic tannin, *Oenotherin B* mentioned above. “Considering these results, the use in traditional medicine of *Epilobium angustifolium* extract against BPH seems to be justified,” concluded the researchers. “However,” they cautioned, “further experimental studies are needed to determine the biochemical mechanism of the action and the value of *E. angustifolium* extract in a controlled clinical trial.”

THE DOCTORS’ PRESCRIPTION

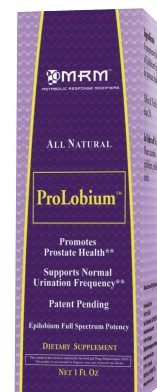
Given that the herbal compound epilobium has similar effectiveness in comparison with prescription medications, such as finasteride, but none of their side effects as described earlier, it should be a natural choice for prostate health (and, curiously, for the indication of male-pattern baldness, as well). MRM’s formulation of epilobium, called Prolobium, best captures the potency of this herbal, and is therefore an obvious choice. And for men not receiving the benefits they desire from saw palmetto, this proprietary formula of Prolobium is a viable alternative.

However, I suspect that as more and more men begin giving Prolobium a try, epilobium will begin to emerge as a leading herb of choice for men’s health itself and perhaps eventually be used in combination formulas. Pay attention to Prolobium. Its epilobium is up and coming in the nutritional products industry. ■

REFERENCES

Thompson, I.M., Goodman, P.J., et al. “The influence of finasteride on the development of prostate cancer.” *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 2003 July 17;349:213-22.

L. Stephen Coles, M.D., Ph.D., is co-founder of the Los Angeles Gerontology Research Group, a director and treasurer of the Supercentenarian Research Foundation, Visiting Scholar with the UCLA Department of Computer Science, and a Research Collaborator with the Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. He is considered to be one of the nation’s leading experts on anti-aging medicine.



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