

WORDS OLIVER WISEMAN



## ASK the doCTOR

# Bothered By your waterworks?

It's not uncommon for men aged between 50 and 80 to experience problems, but all too often they suffer in silence

**W**aterworks problems, also known as lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS), are a common problem in men, especially as they get older. In fact, up to 80 per cent of men between the ages of 50 and 80 may get some degree of bother, and yet many do nothing about it. Many men just accept it as a natural part of getting older, despite the fact that it can significantly affect their quality of life and that ignoring the problem could mean ignoring symptoms of a serious underlying problem with the prostate or bladder. For the majority, however, there are very effective medical and, if needed, surgical treatments which can improve symptoms. Simply put, men who don't seek medical help will be denied this opportunity to improve their quality of life.

### What are the symptoms?

The most common bothersome symptoms are the feeling of needing to pass urine often during the day (frequency), getting up often through the night (nocturia), and suddenly having an urgent need to pass urine (urgency). These symptoms together are called storage symptoms. Men may also notice a poor flow, dribbling after passing urine, and a feeling of incomplete bladder emptying (voiding symptoms). Seeing blood in the urine (haematuria) or having an infection in the urine are more worrying and require urgent medical attention.

### What could the problem be and how can my doctor tell what is causing my symptoms?

The most common cause of LUTS is benign enlargement of the prostate. As men get older the prostate gland grows, and this can press on the urethra (the pipe which leads from the bladder and through which urine passes). This blockage causes the voiding symptoms described above, and the bladder can also experience the storage symptoms described above because it has to work harder to push urine out. In order to diagnose this, urine will be checked for blood or signs of infection and patients will undergo a urine flow test, followed by an ultrasound scan of the bladder. Other causes of LUTS include: **overactive bladder:** As some men get older, their bladder becomes more irritable – these men will have mainly storage LUTS. This diagnosis is made by

ensuring that there is no evidence of more serious disease, and by looking at the result of the flow test (see above) and bladder scan. Some patients may also need a telescope examination of the bladder (flexible cystoscopy).

**bladder cancer:** Tumours of the bladder can cause some of the urinary symptoms above. Patients with bladder cancer will usually have blood in their urine and while some patients will see the blood in the urine themselves, in others it might only be seen on dipstick testing by their GP or specialist. A flexible cystoscopy will help to determine if there is any evidence of bladder cancer.

**prostate cancer:** Most men with prostate cancer have few or no LUTS. A blood test (PSA) and physical examination will help to rule out prostate cancer.

### What are the treatment options for benign enlargement of the prostate?

Men with mild symptoms will require mainly reassurance that there is no evidence of cancer, and they can often manage their symptoms with simple lifestyle modifications such as altering their fluid intake. Men with more troublesome symptoms might be started on medication – likely to take the form of a tablet that helps to relax the prostate (making it easier to pass urine). In most men it is taken once daily and has few side effects. For men who have severe symptoms, haven't responded to or tolerated the medication, or men who have experienced a complication of prostate enlargement such as urinary retention or recurrent urinary infections, surgery may be the only option. Surgical treatment involves removing the prostate tissue causing a blockage by passing a camera up the water pipe and removing it through this channel, without any external scars. This can be done with an electric current (TURP) or a laser (HoLEP).

### What should I do about it?

If you are experiencing waterworks problems it's best to see your GP, who will refer you to a specialist if required. This will give you peace of mind, knowing that there is nothing serious underlying your symptoms, and also allow you to access treatment which should improve your quality of life. ●●



## Urinary retention

Some men may find that they are suddenly unable to pass urine. These men may have had symptoms for some time before, but for others this may be the first time that they have had a problem with their waterworks. When men experience urinary retention they will have a lot of pain, and they need to seek urgent medical help. To bypass the blockage a catheter will be inserted. This will allow urine to drain and relieve the pain. The majority of men who go into retention will need surgery to remove the obstructing prostate tissue. For others it may be possible to remove the catheter once they have started taking tablets to help relax the prostate. Your urologist will be able to advise which approach is the most suitable.

pictured above: Oliver Wiseman, consultant urologist at nuffield Hospital and lead clinician at Addenbrooke's Hospital