

Do Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH) Medications Cause Dementia and Depression?

By Robert Pugach, MD

BPH, also known as enlarged prostate, is a common condition of men. BPH places pressure on the urethra and prevents the bladder from functioning normally and/or emptying completely. Symptoms of BPH include:

- Frequent urination, during the day and/or at night
- A slow or weak urine stream
- Dripping or dribbling of urine after urinating
- Incomplete bladder emptying
- A need to urinate quickly and suddenly

Since the early 1980s, doctors have treated BPH symptoms with medications called alpha blockers. By relaxing small muscle fibers embedded in prostate tissue, they allow the prostate to dilate slightly. The result, in about 25% of men, can be a small improvement in urine flow rate and, in some cases, a decrease in daytime frequency or night time urination. Common side effects of these medications include fatigue, nasal stuffiness, dizziness from low blood pressure and erectile dysfunction.

A serious side effect of alpha blockers is “floppy iris” syndrome. The condition changes the iris in your eye into a softer structure which can make cataract surgery very challenging, or not possible. It can also result in rupture of the eye during surgery. This has been the principal reason why I do not recommend alpha blockers.

Despite the known side effects, alpha blockers are prescribed regularly. In the U.S. alone, about 6 million men take alpha blockers every day. Those numbers are about to change dramatically because new evidence suggests that alpha blockers may cause a much more serious side effect: DEMENTIA!

To date, the only alpha blocker strongly linked to dementia is tamsulosin (Flomax). However, it stands to reason, though, that the other medications in this class may cause the same result.

The other concerning class of medication is 5 alpha reductase inhibitors (5-ARI). The two commonly used are dutasteride and finasteride (Avodart and Proscar). The diluted form of finasteride is sold as Propecia, which many men use to treat hair loss.

These medications can shrink the size of some prostates by as much as 22%. However, most patients do not see significant improvement in their urinating patterns be-



cause the shrinkage occurs at the outer area of the prostate, well away from the urethra.

For many years, the FDA has required the manufacturers of these medications to include a “black box warning” because there is a possible link between them and developing aggressive prostate cancer. That is why I do not prescribe them. Now a new side effect has been suggested: DEPRESSION! So, the two most commonly used medications for BPH may now also cause dementia and depression.

The good news is that it is easy to stop taking medication. Minimally invasive procedures, like Urolift®, are many times more effective than medications, have long lasting results, take less than an hour to do in my office and can end your use of medications!

If you are currently taking an alpha blocker or 5 ARI and would like to avoid the potential side effects, please call my office to schedule an appointment.

BPH and Bladder Control problems in men and women are among the most common problems that we treat at Pacific Coast Urology Medical Center. Please call us at 888.735.4336 to regain control!

