



Patient Information

Bladder Outlet Obstruction

Although bladder outlet obstruction can occur in both women and men, the condition is most common in older men. Bladder outlet obstruction occurs at the base of the bladder when the opening between the bladder and urethra — the duct that discharges urine out of the body — is partially or completely blocked. The condition reduces or prevents urine from emptying from the bladder.

Causes

The most common cause of bladder outlet obstruction in men is noncancerous enlargement of the prostate, which is also known as benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH). Bladder outlet obstruction can also be caused by prostate cancer.

Other causes of bladder outlet obstruction that occur frequently in men include bladder stones, bladder tumors, narrowing or scarring of the urethra, and scarring of the bladder.

Symptoms

How can you tell if you're experiencing bladder outlet obstruction? First, keep in mind that symptoms can begin slowly and get progressively worse. Symptoms of this condition include

- difficulty starting to urinate (urinary hesitancy)
- inability to urinate (acute urinary retention)
- urine stream that starts and stops (urinary intermittency)
- weak urine stream
- frequent urination
- abdominal pain
- pain during urination
- urinary tract infection
- feeling that the bladder is always full.

Diagnosis

If you are experiencing any of the symptoms listed above, let your NP know. He or she will take a thorough history of the problems you're experiencing and perform a physical exam. During the physical exam, your NP may find the cause of the problem, such as an enlarged prostate or abdominal mass.

In addition, men who have bladder outlet obstruction usually have urine left in the bladder, even after urinating. If a lot of urine is left in the bladder, your NP may identify a bulging bladder by feeling the lower abdomen. The urine that remains in the bladder is then measured with an ultrasound or by placing a tube called a urinary catheter in the bladder.

You may have to undergo other tests to figure out how severe your condition is, including uroflowmetry to measure urine flow rate, pressure flow studies to compare the pressure in the bladder with the flow of urine, urinalysis to find blood or infection, or urodynamic testing to determine how well the bladder contracts and the level of blocked urine.

It is important to diagnose bladder outlet obstruction because the condition can sometimes lead to a breakdown of the bladder. This may prevent you from urinating at all. Plus, if the bladder outlet obstruction is caused by a bladder tumor or other type of cancer, it must be treated right away so it does not spread to other parts of the body.

Treatment

If bladder outlet obstruction is diagnosed early, it often can be successfully treated. Treatment depends on the cause of the obstruction, but there are typically two ways that urine can be drained from the bladder.

One option is drainage using a urinary catheter, which is a tube that is inserted through the urethra into the bladder. This method should relieve the obstruction temporarily.

The second option to drain the bladder is a suprapubic catheter, which is a tube inserted through the skin into the abdomen and then into the bladder.

After the bladder outlet obstruction is treated, you must still be on the lookout for urinary symptoms, such as a weak urinary stream. This could mean the treatment failed or that the obstruction has recurred.

Long-term treatment of bladder outlet obstruction may require surgery. Your nurse practitioner will discuss your options with you, if necessary. ❖



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Additional Notes:
