



## Ask the Expert with Dr. Darrell Menard

Find Answers to your Sport Medicine Questions!

### Take Your Prostate to the Gym

**Q:** I am 46 and during a recent medical examination, my physician told me my prostate gland is enlarged. While I am not experiencing any prostate symptoms, I am concerned because my father died of prostatic cancer at the age of 57. I am not as physically active as I should be and I wonder if exercise has any role to play in the health of my prostate gland. *Anonymous*

**A:** Dear Anonymous: Great question! The prostate is a walnut sized male reproductive gland that sits just below the bladder and produces a fluid that nourishes and protects sperm. Despite its small size, the prostate can be a source of troubling things such as: painful infections, inflammation (prostatitis), benign prostatic hypertrophy (enlargement), and cancer. Prostatic cancer is one of the most common cancers affecting men. All prostatic problems can significantly reduce the quality of a man's life. The good news is, regular exercise is one of the best things you can do for the health of your prostate!

Harvard University study found the more physically active men were, the less likely they were to experience prostate gland enlargement. This was true for regular exercisers and also for men who worked in physically demanding jobs. Even men who did regular low intensity exercise, such as easy walking also benefitted. So you don't have to train like an Olympic wannabe to experience these benefits. Other research has shown men with early stage prostate cancer, who walked briskly at least 3 hours/wk, were 57% less likely to have their cancer progress than men who walked less vigorously and less often. Researchers in Italy also found men with chronic prostatitis who did regular exercise had less pain, reduced anxiety/depression and enjoyed a higher quality of life.

We aren't exactly sure how regular physical activity improves prostatic health but the following are some possibilities:

1. By producing anti-inflammatory substances that can reduce prostate tissue damage.
2. By influencing the production of hormones that play a role in the development and progression of prostatic cancer.
3. By activating tumor suppressing genes and genes that help to repair DNA.
4. By helping with weight management - obesity has been linked to more aggressive types of prostate cancer.

Regardless of the mechanism, research has shown being physical active is important for prostate health and vigorous exercise appears to be the most beneficial. If you have prostate problems, your choice of exercise can be important. For example, cycling is a great form of exercise but spending several hours on a hard seat may aggravate an already painful prostate. A prostate friendly bicycle seat or a recumbent bike can help with this problem.

**The Bottom line:** Any activity that is heart healthy will be prostate healthy. Staying physically active offers men numerous health benefits including reducing their risk of having prostate problems. For men who already have prostate problems, regular physical activity can help reduce their symptoms and in the case of prostatic cancer it may reduce the risk of disease progression. Exercise truly is Medicine!

#### Dr. Darrell Menard MD Dip Sport Med

Dr. Darrell Menard is the Surgeon General's specialist advisor in sport medicine. He has worked extensively with athletes from multiple sports and has covered Canadian teams competing at multiple games including the 2012 Olympics and the 2016 Paralympic games. These articles were originally published in the Canadian Forces Journal, the Maple Leaf.

*The Content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read on this page.*