



## Saw Palmetto

### Common Indications:

- Prostate health; used in prostate complaints found in BPH (Stages I and II)
- Urinary tract health
- Hormonal balance

### General Comments:

Saw palmetto is an extract derived from the deep purple berries of the saw palmetto fan palm (*Serenoa repens*), a plant indigenous to the coastal regions of the southern United States and southern California. There is an estimated one million acres of wild saw palmetto palms in Florida, where the bulk of commercial saw palmetto is grown. Saw palmetto berries have been used in American folk medicine for several hundred years as an aphrodisiac and for treating prostate problems.

### Benefits & Mechanism of action:

Saw palmetto appears to have 5-alpha-reductase inhibitory activity (types I and II isoenzymes), thereby preventing the conversion of testosterone to dihydrotestosterone. Hormonal/estrogenic effects have also been reported, as well as fibroblast proliferation inhibition, direct inhibitory effects on androgen receptors and anti-inflammatory properties.<sup>1</sup>

Numerous human trials report that saw palmetto improves symptoms of benign prostatic hypertrophy (BPH) such as nighttime urination, urinary flow, and overall quality of life, although it may not greatly reduce the size of the prostate. The effectiveness may be similar to the medication finasteride (Proscar®) with fewer side effects.

- A 2009 Cochrane Database System Review looked at studies in 5222 men with BPH. The authors concluded that saw palmetto was not more effective than placebo for treatment of urinary symptoms consistent with BPH.<sup>2</sup> Another review by the same authors in 2012 reported similar results, that *Serenoa repens*, at double and triple doses, did not improve urinary flow measures or prostate size in men with lower urinary tract symptoms consistent with BPH.<sup>3</sup>
- A study conducted in 298 men using 8 different centers throughout Italy from September 2010 to November 2011 reported *Serenoa repens* demonstrated efficacy in reducing dysuria with minimal side effects.<sup>4</sup>

- A combination of saw palmetto and nettle (*Urtica dioica*) in 219 people reported significant benefits in LUTS (International Prostate Symptom Score).<sup>5</sup>
- Similar results using saw palmetto and urtica extract in combination have been reported in other human trials.<sup>6,7</sup>
- A 12-month Korean study reported a combination of saw palmetto and pumpkin seed oil in 47 men with BPH was found to improve the quality of life in these patients.<sup>8</sup>
- A 2010 study in 144 patients with BPH reported that using saw palmetto extract (Permixon) as a pre-treatment in transurethral resection of the prostate (TURP) reduced intra- and postoperative complications, including decreasing duration of surgery, decreased duration of catheterization, improvement in hemodynamic parameters and decreased hospitalization length.<sup>9</sup>
- Saw palmetto in combination with curcumin (*Curcuma longa*) and the bioflavonoid quercetin improved the efficacy of in conjunction with the antibiotic prulifloxacin in treating bacterial prostatitis.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Dose:**

- 160mg, 2 times a day of a standardized extract.
  - Symptom relief for enlarged prostate, if achieved, is generally experienced within 4-8 weeks.

\*Note: There are various products with different dosages and standardizations to choose from. When choosing a dietary supplement, select those from reputable manufacturers.

#### **Cautions & Side Effects:**

- Saw palmetto has been reported to be safe in recommended doses.
- Safety during pregnancy and breastfeeding has not been established.
- Isolated cases of saw palmetto inducing hepatitis and pancreatitis have been reported, so use in patients pre-disposed to liver and/or pancreas imbalances should use saw palmetto with caution.<sup>11,12</sup>
- Use with caution if taking the following medications:
  - Anticoagulant medicines, including warfarin (Coumadin) and aspirin
    - 2 case reports of using saw palmetto supplements have involved an increase in bleeding.<sup>13</sup>

#### **References:**

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