

Re: Saw Palmetto Warning

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From: Gut-Buster (*D-D-D-DONT.stare_at_me.privates*)

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This is rubbish. PSA tests have been known to be about as conclusive as a digital rectal exam for some time now. Your warning just means people getting some relief from Saw Palmetto will now be worried, unnecessarily.

"Ed" <ed@online.net> wrote in message news:uRK%d.3077\$QZ7.1817@fe09.lga...

> *Saw Palmetto Warning : Problems with Detecting Prostate Cancer?*

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> *The purpose of this letter is to alert physicians and the general public*

> *to*

> *the potential implications regarding the detection and treatment of*

> *prostate*

> *cancer involved with the use of an alternative supplement sold in health*

> *food stores called saw palmetto. Prostate cancer is the most commonly*

> *diagnosed cancer in American men. In 1996, an estimated 317,100 new cases*

> *of*

> *prostate cancer, and 41,400 deaths from prostate cancer will be found,*

> *among*

> *men in the United States. It is the second most common cause of death in*

> *men*

> *older than 55. Early detection is the most important factor for cure! We*

> *are*

> *detecting prostate cancer within the past decade with increasing*

> *frequency,*

> *and many patients with this condition are receiving such treatments as*

> *radical prostatectomy and radiation therapy for cure.*

>

> *Although refinements in PSA-based testing have contributed substantially*

> *to*

> *the increased detection rate of prostate cancer, the incidence of disease*

> *was increasing dramatically even before the detection of PSA was possible.*

> *Self medication for prostate disorders has increased throughout the US and*

> *the rest of the world. Saw palmetto in particular raises concerns for*

- > urologists regarding their ability to diagnose and treat prostate cancer.
- > I
- > have seen many patients who have placed themselves on this herb. Its use
- > is
- > advised in advertisements and other marketing for treatment and prevention
- > of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH), prostatitis, and "urinary
- > difficulty"
- > in men.
- >
- > The extract comes from the berries of the palm tree saw palmetto (*Serenoa*
- > *Repens*, *Serenoa Serrulata*), which is indigenous in the Atlantic southeast
- > coast of North America from South Carolina to Florida and native to the
- > West
- > Indies. The plant grows six to 10 feet tall, with a crown of large
- > spiny-leaves that form a circular, fan-shaped outline. The berries are
- > deep
- > red-brown or black and are oblong and about one inch long. The extract
- > from
- > these berries is cheap and easy to purchase. Word has been spread via
- > direct
- > marketing, as well as by advertisements in magazines and throughout the
- > Internet. Reports, mostly in the European literature, suggest that use of
- > saw palmetto can decrease the size of the prostate and improve urinary
- > symptoms (dose dependent) after months of use.[1] No "well done"
- > long-term,
- > double-blind, placebo-controlled studies of saw palmetto have been done to
- > date.[2] Although saw palmetto does not affect certain hormonal levels,
- > there is clinical evidence, however, to suggest that its mechanism of
- > action
- > is similar to that of the commonly prescribed prostate drug finasteride
- > (Proscar). For example, several animal studies[3, 4] suggest that saw
- > palmetto has a similar effect on competitively inhibiting the binding of
- > dihydrotestosterone (DHT) and blocking the conversion of testosterone to
- > DHT, via its inhibition of 5-alpha reductase.
- >
- > Saw palmetto's primary therapeutic action is to inhibit 5-alpha reductase
- > in
- > forming DHT and to a lesser extent, 3-alpha reductase, and to block the
- > action of DHT to receptors on prostate cells via 3-ketosteroid reductase.
- > Research has also shown an anti-inflammatory[5] and antiestrogenic[3, 6,7]
- > effect of *Serenoa Repens*. Use of saw palmetto in >patients with BPH
- > results
- > in reduction in the size of the prostate.[5] With finasteride, however,
- > studies have shown that 6 to 12 months of >treatment with 5 mg of
- > finasteride daily can reduce prostate volume, DHT, and prostate-specific
- > antigen (PSA) levels by 50 percent.[8] Therefore, any patient placed on
- > finasteride must have a baseline PSA and digital rectal examination. The
- > mechanism of action mimics the pharmacologic action of finasteride, which
- > has recently been documented to be of little physiologic value compared
- > with
- > a placebo or alpha blockers.[9] The purified extract of saw palmetto

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> contains 85% to 95% fatty acids and sterols. Unfortunately, there are many
> forms of this extract on the market, containing additives and many
> combinations of other herbs, vitamins, and minerals. Consequently the
> consumer does not know exactly what he is purchasing. Saw palmetto has
> been
> used in Europe for more than 20 years. Research there, however, has
> included
> clinical studies showing its clinical urologic effects versus a placebo.
> [10] Only one study measured the PSA levels prematurely after 3 months "the
> treatment did not significantly alter PSA concentrations in these
> patients." [13] However 5-alpha reductase inhibitors will reduce the PSA
> levels by average of 50% after 6-12 months of use, invalidating this study
> on PSA. Consequently of most significance is the lack of well planned
> "long
> term clinical studies" concerning the effects of saw palmetto on "lowering
> the PSA" levels after 6-12 months! Any interference with PSA makes this
> test
> useless as a diagnostic tool for prostate cancer.
>
> The use of saw palmetto is not regulated by the FDA (its use falls under
> the
> guidelines for food supplements). In my own clinical practice, I have seen
> many patients on saw palmetto who were embarrassed to bring this to my
> attention. I have also noticed a dramatic drop in PSA levels when patients
> have been on this herb for many months, making my clinical diagnostic
> determination of prostate cancer more complex. Any 5-alpha reductase
> inhibitor--whether saw palmetto or finasteride--will reduce PSA
> significantly. I quote Dr. Julian Whitaker in his book, Prostate
> Report--Prevention and Healing[11]: "When one of my patients has an
> elevated
> PSA, I don't rush him off for a biopsy. Instead, I encourage him to go on
> a
> low-fat diet, and I prescribe a daily course of serenoa repens extract,
> 360
> mg a day, along with zinc and a regimen of antioxidant vitamins and
> minerals. We then recheck his PSA level periodically, and it has been my
> clinical experience that, in many cases, the PSA gradually falls." This is
> an example of how an underlying condition, possibly prostate cancer, can
> potentially be concealed by losing the sensitivity of the PSA diagnostic
> test. Although refinements in PSA-based testing have contributed
> substantially to the increased detection of early prostate cancer, the
> incidence of the disease is increasing dramatically although the detection
> by PSA--incidence is alling since 1992. [12] Possibly the confusion in the
> literature about when to and who to treat prostate cancer has contributed
> to
> this decline. So has the introduction of medical therapy with 5-alpha
> reductase inhibitors and herbs introduced during the same time period. The
> most disturbing aspects of self-treatment with such herbal remedies are
> their potential effects in masking PSA, which has revolutionized our
> ability
> to pick up prostate cancer. If one curtails the ability to detect prostate

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- > cancer by PSA, many cancers will progress undetected until it is too late,
- > resulting in Stage D Disease.
- >
- > As a clinical urologist, I feel that the public deserves and has the right
- > to know these possible consequences—further research is needed. I am not
- > saying that saw palmetto or finasteride should never be used, but only
- > that
- > they should be used with careful medical supervision and after obtaining a
- > baseline PSA and digital rectal exam. Although saw palmetto is an herb, we
- > must treat it as a medicine. Since saw Palmetto can act as a 5-alpha
- > reductase inhibitor, thereby potentially interfering with PSA levels in
- > men
- > and decrease prostate cancer detection, it is imperative that men get a
- > baseline PSA level (as is recommended by the FDA for Finasteride, but not
- > for the unregulated use of Saw Palmetto). Men self-medicate themselves
- > with this herb are not aware of this detrimental effect. We are in a new
- > world where patients are more inclined to self-treat their medical
- > conditions with alternative means. I believe that there is some merit to
- > this, with proper guidance by qualified individuals. The escalating cost
- > of
- > medicines in the US has provoked Americans to seek more cost-effective
- > approaches, which is one of the many dilemmas that our present health care
- > system has to address promptly. Doctors need to be better educated about
- > nutrition and alternative medicine. Physicians in the US are not informed
- > about alternative botanical medicine; we are far behind the European
- > community in this regard. I believe that there are many benefits to
- > botanical treatments for many ailments when combined with nutritional
- > approaches. We must discover the alternative approaches that are
- > accessible
- > to us, while simultaneously using these remedies when appropriate and
- > combining them with conventional medical treatment. We must start to
- > incorporate this into our medical schools and residency programs so that
- > we
- > maintain the doctor-patient relationship. To render a proper diagnostic
- > evaluation, doctors and patients must communicate with each other, which
- > means that patients should inform their doctors about their use of any
- > over-the-counter vitamins, minerals, or herbs. A man who treats himself
- > may
- > have a fool for a patient!
- >
- > Arnaldo F. Trabucco, M.D
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- > Elmhurst, NY
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