

*SAW PALMETTO - THE UNTOLD STORY

By Mike King

Only one single study, which was printed in the Feb. 9, 2006, issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* has sited that a specific preparation of saw palmetto extract provided no better relief in causing urinary symptoms caused by benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) or enlarged prostate than a placebo. Immediately, the media began reporting such things, as “Popular Herb Shows No Benefit for Prostate “or” Saw Palmetto is ineffective in the treatment of BPH.” Actually, these statements are far from the truth and have been called by many leading doctors, nutraceutical scientists, truth advocates, and educational counsels as “misleading, misrepresenting, dangerous, inconsistent, confusing and overreaching.” – WOW.

Dr. Aaron Katz, M.D., professor, director, and board-certified urologist at the Center for Holistic Urology at Columbia University Medical Center has stated, “From my own work experience, and reviewing the literature, I believe that the results will show that in the patient with mild to moderate symptoms, saw palmetto is safe, effective, and likely to be as good as the medications out on the market.” He further states that “Saw palmetto works in a manner similar to the drug finasteride” and “As for side effects, there are none, and no known causes of drug interactions.” According to UC Berkeley Wellness Letter December 2005, “Contrary to earlier reports, saw palmetto does not affect the results of Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) testing.” PSA testing measures blood levels of protein made in the prostate - an early, but not totally accurate indicator of possible cancer.

So why is there a “negative study” from the University of California at San Francisco about Saw Palmetto? Well. Let’s take a close look at the study and address viable rumors. First there were rumors that the study was indirectly funded by Merck, the maker of Celebrex and also the maker of finasteride (Proscar) the popular prostate shrinking drug which also has come under fire due to its side effects and negative clinical studies. The fact is the study was funded primarily by the National Institutes of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases, with additional funding from the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Health – a division of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and with indirect funding from Merck.

Here are the most important facts about the study that you should know. The study was done on 225 men with moderate to severe (stage 2 to 3) BPH. Minor adverse effects in the saw palmetto and placebo groups were nearly equal – evidence of the safety of saw palmetto. However, there were nearly twice as many serious adverse effects in the placebo group as compared to the saw palmetto group. This suggests that the patient population may have had other serious illnesses, possibly interfering in the treatment of the moderate to severe BPH symptoms.

According to Mark Blumethal, Founder and Executive Director of the American Botanical Council, “Most of the official international monographs (scholarly formal reports) that recognize the benefits of saw palmetto do so for stage 1 and 2 BPH, i.e., the mild to moderate range of BPH symptoms. These include monographs from the German government and the World Health Organization.” A meta-analysis (statistical analysis of a group of studies) of 18 clinical trials published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

in 1998 and another review by the independent Cochran Collaboration in 2002 which looked at 21 trials (including more than 3,000 men and lasting 48 weeks) have confirmed the safety and efficacy of saw palmetto extract preparations in treating symptoms of BPH, usually in stage 1 or 2. The Cochran review further concludes that the clinical literature supports the use of saw palmetto preparations in treating symptoms of BPH in stages 1 and 2, and that saw palmetto preparations have shown efficacy and greater safety when compared to conventional pharmaceutical drugs and are as effective as the pharmaceutical alpha blockers or the smooth muscle relaxants.

The dosage of the saw palmetto extract in the study was 160mg twice per day, which has been shown to be the standard effective dosage for, stage 1 and 2 BPH. There obviously would need to be a higher dosage for the later stages of BPH. Many other studies have shown increased positive effects when saw palmetto is combined with other herbs. Herbs are usually used in combinations as they provide a more powerful synergistic effect. Furthermore, in a recent interview I had with Herb Lewis, one of the owners and directors of New Chapter, one has to also look at the quality and extraction process of the Saw Palmetto being used. (New Chapter is the leader in producing supercritical extracted supplements). When you look for quality in a botanical it's like looking at the difference between a regular onion and a Vidalia onion when one is looking for a mild sweet onion or a great wine verses poor wine. As they say, "It's all in the grapes used to make the wine."

There is a little known but powerful study out of Germany in April of 1992, which verifies the supreme anti-inflammatory activity of a supercritical fluid (SCF) extract of saw palmetto for BPH. With supercritical fluid extraction we are looking at high tech science at its very best. The fluid, as it is termed, is neither a gas nor a liquid and is best described as intermediate to the two extremes. When I was in school there were three states of matter: solid, liquid, and gas. Now, there's SCF the fourth state of matter. Interestingly, the technology originated out of trying to improve beer by cleanly extracting the most important and whole flavor components from hops. SCF extraction uses the totally harmless naturally occurring CO2 gas and is also widely used in making pure and safe decaffeinated coffee. It has been proven to concentrate the most powerful components in a botanical like saw palmetto by 250 times. Just think how effective a SCF extracted, "specimen" (super high quality plant cultivar), organically grown saw palmetto supplement would be!

So, it might have been more accurate to report that this lone study proved that a known low dose of a standard common saw palmetto extract not in combination with any other botanical given to men with moderate to severe BPH, some critically ill, is not helpful. Of course, I think the body of science and studies had already indicated that. In 1892, (Over 113 years ago) an article by A. L. Macy appeared in the *American Journal of Urology*. Macy noted that 9 of 10 men eventually will suffer an enlarged prostate, and that saw palmetto had been proven especially effective in treating the problem!

****This information is for educational purposes only and is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease.***