Introduction to the Male Reproductive System

In short, the primary function of the reproductive system as a whole is to produce offspring. The male reproductive system is quite simple when compared to the female reproductive system. In this regard there are less conditions afflicting the system and a much smaller materia medica for its therapeutics. While female reproductive complaints are quite common among young and older women alike, the male system commonly has problems later on in life. Therefore, this section will be much shorter than many of our other organ system sections.

The Physical System

• Anatomy and Physiology
Generally speaking, both the female and the male reproductive systems can be divided into 2 primary anatomical categories: the primary sex organs (IE gonads) and the accessory reproductive organs, which includes the various ducts, glands, and genitalia. My main goal in covering anatomy and physiology is to give you a sense of the underlying physiology of the system as it impacts disease predisposition and imbalances. As the male reproductive system is relatively simple and has only a few troubles associated with it, we will keep the A&P relatively brief here. Much of the functioning of the system is governed by the endocrine system, which we will cover briefly in this section as it is specific to this system.

The primary structural and functional units of the male reproductive system are:

• Scrotum- sac that protects and maintains temperature around testes for viable sperm production
• Testes- manufacture sperm via the seminiferous tubules as well as androgen hormones via the interstitial cells (aka Leydig cells). The main circulation is via the testicular arteries and the veins, which form a network called the pampiniform plexus (which not only drain venous blood, but cool arterial blood). There is also rich autonomic nerve innervation in the area, hence their sensitivity.
• Penis- primary function to eliminate urine from the body and to deliver sperm to female reproductive tract. Contains spongy tissues with smooth muscles surrounded by vascular spaces which are able to be filled with blood and engorge the area. Important to this process is switching the nervous system into the parasympathetic state, which allows nitric oxide (NO) to be released which dilates the peripheral vasculature. It is interesting to note that erection is a parasympathetic response, whereas ejaculation is a sympathetic response. At the moment of climax, there is a massive discharge of nerve impulses through the sympathetic nerves, which cause the ducts and glands to spasm and propel the semen throughout the system, the bladder sphincter muscles contract preventing urine secretions and semen back flow into the bladder.
• The Duct System- conducts sperm from testes out of the body.
  • Epididymis: storage of sperm
  • Vas Deferens (aka Ductus Deferens): move sperm from the epididymis into the pelvic cavity. It loops around the urinary bladder and descends into the prostate gland from the ejaculatory ducts.
  • Urethra: the final part of the journey, conducts both semen and urine out of the body (though at different times).
Accessory Glands- produce the bulk of semen which the sperm reside in.
- Seminal Vesicles- these 2 glands reside on the bottom end of the urinary bladder and function to secrete nutrient rich fluids into the ejaculate, such as: fructose, ascorbic acid, enzymes (vesiculase), prostaglandins, and other substances which aid in sperm motility. These secretions are 60% of semen. This joints the vas deferens in the ejaculatory duct, which moves into the prostate.
- Prostate- this singular gland is shaped like a donut, with the urethra passing right through the middle. This gland is composed of a thick connective tissue capsule with smooth muscles surrounding the glands. It secretes fluids into the semen via multiple ducts during prostatic contraction. It directly activates the sperm and contains citrate, various enzymes, and prostate-specific antigen (PSA). This latter substance is important in the screening for prostate cancer as well as BPH (discussed later). The prostate is likely the most important anatomical feature of the male system as it is the most prone to disease.
- Bulbourethral glands- Secrete thick, clear mucous into the spongy urethra in the penis to neutralize traces of acidic urine in the tract.

Hormonal Regulation- hormonal regulation of spermatogenesis (sperm formation) and the production of sex hormones (mainly testosterone) in the testes is governed by the hypothalamus and anterior pituitary glands in the brain. We can think of it as the HPT axis-Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Testicular axis. The process is as follows:

1. GnRH (Gonadotropin Releasing Hormone) is released from the hypothalamus, which triggers the pituitary to secrete LH (Luteinizing Hormone) and FSH (Follicle Stimulating Hormone)- note these are also hormones of the female reproductive system.
2. FSH causes the testes to secrete ABP (Androgen Binding Protein) which makes the cells more receptive to testosterone.
3. LH triggers the secretions of testosterone, which triggers spermatogenesis along with multiple other physiological functions at other tissue sites.
4. Testosterone directly inhibits the hypothalamus from secreting more GnRH and the pituitary from releasing LH and FSH. Another hormone called Inhibin is secreted to regulate sperm production and also inhibits FSH as well as hypothalamic GnRH.

Thus we can see that testosterone secretions are directly influenced by the health of the hypothalamus and pituitary gland, which are regulated as a whole by the brain and Central Nervous System (CNS). So we have 3 mechanisms governing sperm production: 1) GnRH secretions from the hypothalamus, 2) gonadotropin release from the pituitary (LH and FSH), and 3) negative feedback controls by testosterone and inhibin secretions in the testes. This entire process is triggered at puberty and ultimately develops the HPT axis which can take around 3 years. It’s worth mentioning here that the anterior pituitary gland is also responsible for regulation of the thyroid and adrenal hormones, which we will cover in more detail on the endocrine system.

Testosterone- For a complete understanding of the male reproductive system, a discussion on testosterone is essential, for it is the main hormone associated with it’s development, maturation and maintenance. Testosterone is a steroid hormone synthesized from cholesterol and has influences far beyond just the reproductive system in the body. Often we see
Testosterone much be transformed into a different form in order to be utilized properly by the target tissue. In the case of the reproductive system, it must be turned into dihydrotestosterone (DHT) before it can bind, and has the following effects: stimulates formation of the reproductive glands, ducts, and genitalia, promotes descent of the testes, maintains size and function of the system, and stimulates spermatogenesis.

Testosterone also has secondary effects, such as stimulating overall physical growth and skeletal mass, growth of the larynx and deepening of the voice, sebum secretions of the skin (hence acne) and hair growth. It is an anabolic hormone, meaning that it helps to build and strengthen the body as well as increasing basal metabolism- it also is responsible for libido (in men and women), promotes aggressiveness, and masculinizes the brain.

It is worth mentioning that the adrenal glands also secrete androgen hormones, though not enough to support normal testosterone levels. These weak androgens, such as androstenedione and dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) are converted into testosterone thus the testes are the primary part of the male endocrine system.

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**Pathological Patterns and Tissue States**

According to Matthew Wood, the six tissue state model doesn’t quite apply as well to describing male reproductive pathology- as it’s patterns are a bit more limited than other systems. It is helpful to look at the Chinese system here, as they say there are 2 primary pathologies afflicting this system- yin deficiency or yang deficiency. He breaks them down as follows:

- **Yin Deficiency:** dry/atrophy
- **Yang Deficiency:** damp/stagnation or relaxation
- **Both in Deficiency:** cold/depression (this would be the latest progression of both yin and yang deficiency.)

**6 Tissue States**

- **Dry/Atrophy:** It’s important to remember here that this tissue state isn’t simply just dryness, but the withering, weakening, and atrophying of tissues due to malnutrition and dehydration. It is best equated to vata in the Ayurvedic model, which is the predominant dosha of old age. The most common symptom associated with this tissue state would be BPH, which is likely the biggest complaint in the male reproductive system. The old doctors equated it with the pattern they called “neurasthenia” or nervous debility, which would certainly impact the health of the system. Again, we can generally think of this as yin deficiency, or lack of moisture and nourishment to the system. Common symptoms would be lack of reproductive fluids, atrophy of the testicles, hardening of the prostate, premature ejaculation, systemic dryness, infertility, impotence, and excessive nervousness, ear, or compulsive thoughts/feelings around sex. Important remedies here include: Nettle root (*Urtica dioica*), Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*), Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*), Milky Oats & grass (*Avena sativa*), Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*), and Pumpkin seeds.
• **Damp/Stagnation** - Dampness accumulating within the system will typically be accompanied by systemic stagnation in the entire organism. Because the glands of the male reproductive system (seminal vesicle, prostate, and bulbourethral glands) are responsible for fluid secretions they are especially prone to this tissue state. We can think of this as congestion of fluids leading to swelling and under-activity. They will generally respond well to alteratives, diuretics, and circulatory stimulants. A few remedies include Poke root (*Phytolacca decandra*), Cleavers (*Galium aparine*), Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*), Nettle leaf and root (*Urtica dioica*), Red Root (*Ceanothus spp.*), and Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*). Note many of these are lymphatic remedies to decongest stagnant fluids.

• **Damp/Relaxation** - We can think of relaxation in the male reproductive system as either the penis unable to retain blood and therefore is unable to get erect, or it could be overall laxity in the tubules and ducts allowing fluids to passively leak out of the urethra. Basically we want to think this individual is loosing fluids through the urinary tract, which could also be bedwetting, poor urine retention, premature ejaculation, frequent urinary, and involuntary loss of reproductive fluids. Because the reproductive fluids are seen as the energetic essence of a man, there will be typically very low energy levels, weakness in the low back and knees (kidney deficiency), impotence, malaise and general lethargy. Their vitality is low. This can all also be associated with simply too frequent ejaculation, which in Chinese Medicine is said to rapidly deplete ones vital force and chi. Again we can think of this as yang deficiency. As usual, our main remedies here are tonic/astringents: Red Root (*Ceanothus spp.*), Oak bark (*Quercus alba*), Sumach (*Rhus typhina*), and White Water Lilly (*Nuphea odorata*).

• **Cold/Depression** - According to Matthew Wood, this tissue state is not quite as relevant as the ones above, but forms when the deficiencies of both yin and yang (fluids and vitality) have become extremely pronounced. This could be the point where prostatic cancer begins to form. A few remedies he mentions specifically here include Gravelroot (*Eupatorium purpureum*), Chinese Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), and Queen Anne’s Lace (*Daucus carota*).

Matthew has another set of patterns for assessing the reproductive system in general based on the focus on the endocrine system, IE androgen excess or deficiency. Let’s take a look at these for a sense of the bigger picture of this system.

• **Androgen Excess** - Here we see there being a predisposition towards excess testosterone production. As we saw above, testosterone doesn’t simply activate sperm production, but a wide variety of other physiological factors. What we often see is a high degree of pitta in the system, leading to anger, frustration, irritability, and excess sexual energy. An important consideration with this picture is that to many androgens ultimately puts excess stress on the liver, which has to detoxify these hormones- which is a lot of work. Many times one will see drug and alcohol consumption to self-medicate ones stress levels, putting even more strain on the liver. We will likely see oily acne on the skin, as testosterone thickens the skin and increases sebum secretions. Metabolism is greatly increased, specifically the anabolic side,
thus we can see increased muscle mass and potential for weight gain. Don’t forget that women secrete testosterone as well, and that estrogen is also an androgen hormone - excess of one can certainly accompany an excess of the other. Other symptoms we can see accompanying androgen excess are insomnia and difficulty sleeping, nervousness, headaches, head hair loss (but increase bodily hair in other places), elevated LDL, reduced HDL, stiff low back, persistent erections, and overall tension and frustration. Typically this state responds well to bitter hepatic remedies, especially those with a nervine quality as well, such as Mugwort (Artemesia vulgaris), Wild Lettuce (Lactuca virosa), California Poppy (Eschscholzia californica), Dandelion root (Taraxacum officinale), Blessed Thistle (Cnicus benedictus).

• **Androgen Deficiency:** A steady decline of testosterone in men is a natural part of the aging process. We see essentially the opposite pattern as that from androgen excess: loss of sexual function and lowered libido, low energy levels, fatigue, depression, low weight, muscular atrophy or wasting, and generalized weakness. We can also see loss of bodily hair, male breast growth, infertility, shrinking and softening of the testicles, softness to the voice and swollen/tender prostate gland. Some remedies include Burdock root (Arctium lappa), Pumpkin seeds (Cucurbita spp.), Puncture Vine (Tribulus terrestris), Pine pollen (Pinus spp.), Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens), and Sarsaparilla (Smilax officinalis).

**Evaluation Criteria**

In regards to our evaluation pattern we have been observing throughout this course, there are not any pulse positions or areas of the tongue that indicate the male reproductive system specifically. Though in observing the kidney pulses we can generally get a sense of the overall vitality of the person and thus libido and sex drive. Here we want to look at the area underneath the eyes and note any sunken features or dark coloration.

Ultimately, our best evaluation criteria for the male reproductive system is excellent interview skills, including gathering information about the onset, various factors that provoke or palliate the symptoms, how the condition radiates into other areas of life (for example loosing sleep due to urinary disfunction etc.), the severity of the issue, and timing. Also of prime importance is assessing the overall constitution of the individual and determining the underlying tissue state behind the condition.

**The Energetic System**

**Jing/Ojas:** We return to the concept of jing here, as it is a central aspect for understanding the dynamics of the male reproductive system. In Chinese Medicine, sperm is seen as the physical manifestation of jing, and when dispensed too frequently the vitality of the man is said to be reduced. Incredible amounts of energy goes towards sperm production. Upon ejaculation, the immune system is lowered, the hormonal cascade shifts, and digestive functions decrease (among other physiological functions), because the vital force is intent on creating more life. Thus the male vital force goes into producing and manufacturing more sperm for the sake of species survival! Over prolonged periods of time, this is said to deplete a mans vitality, reduce length of life, and depress the immune system. In Chinese Medicine, they
said that the primary ways in which men deplete their jing is through overwork and 
ejaculatory sex. This concept is equally reflected in the Ayurvedic tradition as ojas.

Astrologically, the male reproductive system comes under the dominion of Mars, whose glyph 
could be considered to look slightly like the external genitalia. As the Sun governs our overall 
viability, and is the quintessence of the masculine force, also bears important 
correspondences for male reproductive health, especially libido and sexual drive. The main 
Sign we want to consider here is Scorpio, the ruler of the reproductive system as a whole. 
This makes a lot of sense, as Scorpio is the archetype of generation and regeneration (as well 
as degeneration) and is all about sex, death and the occult. It is one of the most sensuous of all 
the Signs. Thus the 8th House becomes important territory of the chart to observe as well. 
Libra and the 7th House also have some correspondence here due to their relationship to the 
kidneys at the top of the genito-urinary tract.

Thus when observing a chart of someone with potential reproductive issues, these are the 
main forces we want to look for in determining the underlying astral influences. Of course, 
Saturn will have a restricting and limiting impact, Jupiter will have an expanding and 
stagnating influence. Mars an inflammatory effect, and Venus a relaxant effect. Poor aspects 
to the Sun in Scorpio, around the 6th House may lend predispositions, or the 6th House ruler 
in Scorpio poorly aspected. Neptune and/or the South Node is Scorpio may diminish sexual 
vitality and libido, Uranus may generate tension, etc. Always look to Mars, the Sun, Scorpio 
and the 8th House.

Primary Herbal Actions

Again we see a slight limitation here in regards to herbal actions beneficial for the male 
reproductive system, as there aren’t necessarily actions specific to this system. But there are a 
handful of actions that are beneficial in holistic treatment, each one of course being specific for 
particular underlying tissue state dynamic.

Reproductive Tonic: This is a pretty generalized term to denote herbs which have a specific 
affinity for the male reproductive system. These are remedies which exert influence upon 
entire sphere of the male reproductive system- prostate and urinary tract health, hormonal 
regulation of testosterone, libido and sexual vitality, etc. There are a handful of primary tonics 
we can think of in this regard, the most famous of which is Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens), but 
also here we find Nettle root (Urtica dioica), Pine Pollen (Pinus spp.), Puncture Vine (Tribulus 
terrestris),

Diuretic: This is likely one of our most beneficial actions for this system as it delivers things 
directly to the afflicted area. Of course, this is primarily used in the relief of issues which are 
reflexing or radiating into the urinary tract (IE swollen prostate). I typically prefer to use the 
tonic diuretics which are also highly nutritive, especially when there is atrophy of the prostate, 
such as Dandelion leaf (Taraxacum officinale), Horsetail (Equisetum arvense), and Nettle leaf 
(Urtica dioica).

Circulatory Stimulant: These are particularly beneficial for bringing fresh oxygenated blood 
supply to the various glands and organs of the system, delivering nutrients and allowing waste
products to be filtered and detoxified. This action is particularly helpful for men with erectile dysfunction- which often accompanies cardiovascular issues. Classic circulatory stimulants such as Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*), Cayenne (*Capsicum annuum*), Rosemary (*Rosmarinus officinalis*), Prickly Ash (*Zanthoxylum clava-herculiti*), and Garlic (*Allium sativa*) can be used in this regard.

**Aphrodisiacs:** These are of course beneficial for men with impotence and low libido. Some help to increase blood circulation, others nerve excitability and sensitivity, and others more gentle heart opening remedies. Another category of aphrodisiacs would also be our “chi tonics,” or those herbs which help build up our core strength and vitality, nourishing the vital reserve. Stimulant aphrodisiacs include Horny Goat Weed (*Epimedium grandiflorum*) and Yohimbe (*Pausinystalia yohimba*), whereas the more adaptogenic aphrodisiacs would be herbs like Maca (*Lepidium meyenii*), Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*), Siberian Ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*), Schizandra (*Schisandra chinensis*), Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), and Ho Shou Wu (*Polygonum multiflorum*).

**Anti-Inflammatory:** Because the prostate is prone to inflammation (prostatitis), anti-inflammatory remedies can prove to be beneficial here. Now it is preferable to use those remedies which have a specific affinity for the male system, rather than a standard “anti-inflammatory” herb. That being said, if placed in formula, a potent anti-inflammatory like Turmeric (which doesn’t classically have a strong affinity for the male reproductive system) may prove to be highly beneficial as its actions are driven to the desired site of action via the other herbs with the specific affinity- like diuretics or male reproductive tonics like Saw Palmetto and Nettle root. A good specific here, especially for prostatitis is Sweet Leaf (*Monarda fistulosa*).

**Alteratives:** These can be useful in cases of androgen excess, which can ultimately stress out the liver and lead to “bad blood” due to the strain put on it to detoxify too many hormones. These could also be generally supportive in cases of overall stagnation and kapha accumulation which can have a secondary impact upon the prostate and circulation to the pelvic area. They would more specific for damp conditions or excess testosterone and heat.

**Astringent:** Astringency can prove to be effective specifically in the treatment of relaxed tissues, especially of the urinary tract, which can in turn impact the reproductive system as the two systems are to a certain extent inseparable. We want to use these if there is an excess of leaking fluids- be them sexual fluids or urine. Good astringents here would be many of those covered under the urinary tract, such as Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), Nettle (*Urtica dioica*), Uva-Ursi (*Arctostaphyllos uva-ursi*), Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*), Oak (*Quercus alba*), Sumach (*Rubus typhina*), Red Root (*Ceanothus spp.*) and White Water Lilly (*Nymphaea odorata*).

**Materia Medica by Common Symptoms**

- **Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia (BPH):** This is likely one of the most common symptoms of the male reproductive system. Benign here indicates that it is not cancer and hyperplasia indicates excessive tissue growth (it has also been called Benign Prostatic Hypertrophy). It can be accompanied by prostatitis, or inflammation of the prostate as well. The primary
symptoms associated here are difficulty with urination due to the prostate swelling up against the urethra and “kinking the hose” so to speak. This can lead to interrupted or difficult urination, dribbling, incontinence, or frequent/urgent urination. There is increased risk of bladder infections and kidney infections due to urine stagnation. According to modern medicine, the cause of BPH is mostly unknown, though because it impacts the elderly, it is thought to be due to hormonal shifts. There could potentially be a few different tissue states associated with this condition, primarily dry/atrophy and damp/stagnation.

This is the most important condition in treating the male reproductive system, as it is almost universally experienced in men over 60 years old. It is commonly believed to be caused by the shift in the hormonal cascade that occurs in aging men- like a male version of menopause. In the prostate gland, active testosterone is converted into dihydrotestosterone (DHT), which is responsible for growth and development of the prostate. Thus, too much DHT = too large a prostate. This is where we see our 2 primary herbs for the treatment of prostate conditions shine, Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) and Nettle root (*Urtica dioica*). Both of these remedies directly inhibit the formation of DHT by blocking the enzyme 5-alpha-reductase which converts testosterone into DHT. While BPH is benign, it is certainly a potential precursor for prostate cancer, thus medical intervention is worth looking into.

There are 3 distinct stages of prostatic enlargement. In the first stage, there is typically an increased urge for urination, with the stream of urine becoming thinner and more sparse. There is excess tension or pressure on the sphincters that allow the urine to pass, making complete clearance difficult. The second stage is marked by urine retention in the bladder due to it’s inability to fully void it’s contents. There can easily be urinary tract infections in this stage which are relatively rare for men. The 3rd stage is further urinary stagnation which then backs up into the kidneys and can cause kidney damage, which is very serious as we have seen in our kidney discussion.

Holistic treatment of BPH includes using BPH specific herbs, along with other indicated remedies, primarily diuretics, but circulatory stimulants may also prove beneficial, as well as urinary tract disinfectants if infection sets in from stagnation of urine in the bladder. Let’s take a look at a few specific remedies for BPH.

- **Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*):** Over the last few decades, Saw Palmetto has become the #1 go to remedy for the male reproductive system. While it is based on reductionistic science and not an energetic model, this remedy has proven to be highly effective in the treatment of BPH. One of the first thing one notices upon eating the berries, or tasting a simple tincture, is that it tastes awful! This is primarily due to the presence of steroidal saponins which give it a soapy, bitter taste. It is these constituents which assist in the processing of steroidal hormones such as the androgen testosterone in the liver. This is also a signature of it’s impact on inhibiting the conversion of testosterone into DHT which promotes prostatic swelling. This is it’s main scientific claim to fame, as they found the primary “mechanism of action.” Which is quite fascinating indeed, yet in the light of this research we have lost sight of this valuable remedy’s other uses. It’s primary uses are for an enlarged inflamed prostate, prostate and urinary tract infections.
• While today we primarily think of it as a “men’s herb,” it also has traditional uses in treatment of the female reproductive system, catarrhal conditions of the upper respiratory tract, as well as a nervine sedative for nervous excitability and debility. It is best to think of this remedy as a nutritive tonic for the reproductive systems, the adrenal glands, and the nervous system. In this way it has been used for atrophy of the prostate, testes, and uterus, poor structure/function of the urinary organs, polycystic ovarian disease, poor libido, low sperm count, and generalized malnutrition and wasting diseases. It is specifically indicated for the dry/atrophic and heat/excitation tissue states.

• Many studies have shown that extracts of Saw Palmetto are effective for nearly 90% of patients with BPH, making it literally a universal remedy here. The active part is said to primarily be in the fat soluble portion of the herb, thus infusions/decoctions won’t work (and no one would drink the stuff!!), so higher percentage alcohol tinctures are best-around 70-80% or so.

• To quote Finley Ellingwood, “It is demanded in enlarged prostate, with throbbing, aching, dull pain, discharge of prostatic fluid, at times discharge of mucous, also of a yellowsih, watery fluid, with weakened sexual power, orchalgia, epididymitis, and orchitis (note- inflamed testes). In women, ovarian enlargement, with tenderness and dull aching pains, weakened sexual activity, and small undeveloped mammary glands, are much benefited by its continued use.”

• Nettle root (Urtica dioica): It is important here to remember we are talking about the root of Nettles, not the leaves, as they are quite distinct medicines. While they both exert an effect on the genito-urinary tract, we see that the root of Nettle has more of a specific affinity for the prostate gland and male reproductive system, whereas the leaf has a systemic effect upon the entire organism. It has been studied and shown to exert a similar influence as Saw Palmetto on the conversion of testosterone to DHT and thus used with success for the treatment of BPH- though it’s effects are said to be a bit weaker than Saw Palmetto. The root has also shown to improve urine flow, decrease the volume of retained urine, and reduce frequency of urination, especially at night (which is typically a primary complaint in elderly men with this condition). The root may well combine nicely with the leaf for broader spectrum treatment of the genito-urinary tract, though we want to exercise caution in using the leaf in the evening time due to its strong diuretic effect. This is of course a great inflammation modulating remedy, and can be useful in treating prostatitis, reducing swellings, and providing nutrition to debilitated tissues. The leaves have been suggested to be used in treating impotence and erectile dysfunction, primarily due to low blood pressure. The German E Commission suggests using 4-6 g of the root per day for an effective dose.

• Hydrangea (Hydrangea arborescens): This is a remedy that comes to us from the south, which was adopted into use by the Eclectics and Physiomedicalists and used widespread primarily for the treatment of kidney stones. Matthew Wood notes the signature of how it grows near the stream beds and holds the bank together and at the same time is solid in itself so that it doesn’t get washed away. Thus it operates on the sphere of solid/liquid balance of the body- this is very similar to the operations of Gravelroot (Eupatorium purpureum). While we see it primarily influences the kidneys and urinary tract, specifically in the treatment of stones, irritation, spasm in the kidneys, and painful
urination, it has also been used in the treatment of swollen prostate. This makes it an especially specific remedy when there is prostatic swelling accompanied with urinary tract infection, pain and inflammation. It is primarily cooling and bitter in nature, making it specific for irritated, inflamed tissues. The contents of steroidal compounds again indicates an action on the hormonal level, like Saw Palmetto, though it hasn’t been shown to work on DHT in the same manner. These 2 remedies are classically paired in herbal formulas for the treatment of this condition. This remedy is specifically indicated for pitta and vata type constitutions, where the prior is more willful, fiery and energetic, and the latter is prone to nervous exhaustion and tension.

• Sarsaparilla (Smilax officinalis): This herb is typically thought of as a blood purifier, or alterative remedy, which it is indeed. Yet it also has a specific affinity for the male reproductive system which makes it important to consider here in our materia medica listings. Like Saw Palmetto, Smilax contains saponin constituents, giving it a particular affinity for steroidal hormone metabolism in the body. Because it is primarily an alterative, we see it having an affinity for helping the body to rid itself of excess steroid hormones, particularly in the liver. To quote Matthew Wood, “By detoxifying the blood, the liver clears the bloodstream so that the hypothalamus can get a better reading on the contents and regulate the endocrine system. Sarsaparilla is therefore an adaptogen that can normalize steroid activity.” This would make this remedy almost essential for anyone taking steroid precursors from plants, such as Tribulus or Pine Pollen, so that the increase in hormonal levels doesn’t overwhelm the liver. It is primarily a spicy pungent remedy, with an undertone of sweetness, which indicates it’s use in stagnant and depressed tissue states (as a stimulant) as well as atrophic conditions (as a sweet tonic). Specific indications will often include chronic skin conditions like acne or eczema, hormonal mood swings, hyperadrenalism, low libido, and nervousness. As an alterative it also has uses in general blood purification and detoxification, especially when toxins lodge in the joints and cause joint pain.

• A few other specific herbs for swollen prostate include: Red Root (Ceanothus spp.), Burdock (Arctium lappa), Sumach (Rhus typhina), Pipsissewa (Chimaphila umbellata), and Sweet Leaf (Monarda fistulosa).

• Prostatitis: This generalized inflammation of the prostate gland, which can also be accompanied by infection. This can also be accompanied by inflammation of the urethra (urethritis) and bladder infection- the entire picture is called “prostatocystitis.” Typically the symptomatic picture looks similar to an enlarged prostate, with pressurized pain, burning and pain upon urination, which is often leaky, dribbling, and difficult to fully evacuate. If there is excessive inflammation and nicking in the urethral wall there may be blood in the urine and due to infection there may be generalized symptoms such as fever, malaise, and an overall sense of feeling just plain old sick.

Our overall strategy for treating prostatitis is to give flushing diuretic treatments, soothing demulcents, urinary tract specific anti-septics, immunostimulants, and other standard therapeutics such as drinking copious amounts of water, relaxation, sitz baths, avoiding food allergens (gluten and dairy primarily), increasing zinc intake (pumpkin seeds), and doing
contrast hydrotherapy (hot and cold packs alternating, brings blood flow to the area). Apply our materia medica from the kidney/urinary tract section will apply here so reference that material for UTI treatment.

In short though, here is a list of some herbs that can be applicable: male reproductive tonics (Saw Palmetto, Siberian Ginseng, Ashwaganda), urinary antiseptics (Buchu, Pipsissewa, Yarrow, Oregon Grape, Uva-Ursi, Echinacea), diuretics (ideally nutritive ones like Horsetail, Dandelion leaf, Cleavers, and Cornsilk), and demulcents (Marshmallow, Couch Grass, Cornsilk, Plantain). Generally speaking, if an infection doesn’t start to clear up in a number of days, it might be worth going to see a doctor, but it also may indicate a deeper level of immunodeficiency. Thus taking some deeper acting immune tonics like Reishi or Siberian Ginseng could help build up their vitality so they can handle the infection. Also avoiding food allergens is key as if they are eating a food they have an inflammatory response to it will be difficult to “turn down the fire.”

- **Impotence:** This is a general category of issues including erectile dysfunction, inability to ejaculate, low libido, or low sexual energy. While not necessarily considered a “disease,” it can certainly be frustrating and responds well to the use of herbs. Generally speaking, our goal is to build core vitality and chi through the use of remedies like Schizandra (Schizandra chinensis), He Shou Wu (Polygonum multiflorum), Chinese Ginseng (Panax ginseng) note only use if they are cold!, and Ashwaganda (Withania somnifera), as well as circulatory stimulants like Prickly Ash (Zanthoxylum clava-herculitis), Cayenne (Capsicum annuum), Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis), or Ginger (Zingiber officinale), as well as nerve relaxants to settle nerve tension- here Blue Vervain (Verbena hastata) shines, as well as Kava-Kava (Piper methysticum). Many of the herbs on the market today for men contains 3 herbs which have been shown to help treat low sexual energy.

  - **Yohimbe (Pausinystalia yohimba)**- This herb is a pretty potent nervous system stimulant, specifically to the lower centers of spinal cord, as well as a circulatory stimulant with a specific affinity for the pelvic area. It assists greatly with erectile dysfunction and low libido, though some say it is potentially slightly toxic and shouldn’t be used regularly for long periods of time. Finley Ellingwood states that it is specific for impotence due to a functional disorder, primarily rooted in the nervous system. We can think of this as the nerve responses are deadened somehow and need stimulation. It is specifically contraindicated whenever there is acute inflammation of the sexual organs or urinary tract, as it is too stimulating for use here. Because of it’s stimulating nature, taking too much may aggravate a nervous heart condition and should generally not be combined with other drugs or alcohol.

  - **Horny Goat Weed (Epimedium grandiflorum)**- This is an herb from Chinese Medicine that has recently been popularized as an aphrodisiac specifically for men. It has it’s use as a circulatory stimulant specifically for the pelvic area and is thus used for erectile dysfunction and involuntary ejaculation. It also stimulates sperm production. Typically this remedy is not suggested to be used for prolonged periods of time, as it doesn’t really get to the root of the problem- it’s really a “quick fix.” The same is true for Yohimbe.
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wanted to mention these 2 herbs because they are quite popular and common, but it’s worth knowing that they are not the most ideal remedies to use.

- **Puncture Vine (Tribulus terrestris)** - Tribulus is a traditional Ayurvedic remedy which has gained significant popularity over the years as a natural source of testosterone precursors, primarily due to the presence of steroidal saponins in the plant. In this way it is commonly being used (and marketed) in the supplement industry as an exercise and fitness herb, as well as an aphrodisiac. Pharmacologically, what we do know is that it stimulates the anterior pituitary to secrete more LH (Luteinizing Hormone) which stimulates testosterone production. When we look to the tradition of Ayurveda though, we see a slightly different picture. It has a sweet tastes, indicating a rejuvenative and tonic property for dry/atrophic tissue states. As such it is said to be a premier *rasayana* for vata, as well as pitta, for it is a cooling plant. It is traditionally used in the treatment of kidney and urinary tract conditions as a diuretic, antiseptic, antilithic, and kidney tonic. For the male reproductive system, we see Tribulus is excellent for calming easily excitable nerves, enhances ones resilience to stress, strengthens the vital reserve, promotes energy and clarity, strengthens libido, and is indicated for prostate problems. Thus this remedy could be seen as an overall male reproductive tonic like Saw Palmetto, though with a slightly different twist. Also worth mentioning here is that it is also used for the female reproductive system for preventing miscarriage, speeding recovery after childbirth, and settling excess vata & pitta. On a pharmacological note, it does contain harmala and harmaline alkaloids which have an inhibitory effect on monoamine oxidase (it is an MAOI), making it contraindicated for use with anti-depressant medications. It also shouldn’t be used with blood thinners or anti-psychotic medications.

- **Blue Vervain (Verbena hastata)**: I wanted to briefly mention Blue Vervain here because it is such a specific when there is low libido or decreased sexual energy due to an excess of nervousness, stress, and tension. The Blue Vervain person is typically overworked, wired but tired, and rigid in their physical body- especially around the neck and shoulders. Matthew mentions it is a remedy specific for “wind and heat arising from low fluids, yin deficiency, or dry/atrophy. It combines all these tissue states to some extent.” So we want to think of a specific picture of someone who is dry, hot, tense and nervous but tired. The old doctors noted that it is a specific for bringing increased circulation to the genitals, probably not through a direct stimulating action on the blood, but rather through relaxing vascular tension. It can be good for men who can’t get out of their head and simply be present with their partner.

- We will cover more of the deeply nourishing adaptogenic remedies to build core vitality and libido under the endocrine section, which is a more fitting place for their discussion. But in general, we want to think in terms of adaptogens to build core vitality, as well as nervines to settle nervous exhaustions, and trophorestoratives to rebuild neural tone, as well as potentially circulatory stimulants if there is underlying diabetes or cardiovascular pathologies.

Nutritional Factors
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Zinc and Pumpkin Seeds
Omega fatty acids
Herbal enemas and suppositories- not necessarily nutritional, but can be beneficial for topical application of herbs in cases of prostatitis or BPH.

This recipe comes from James Green’s “The Male Herbal”

1. Boil 2 oz ground flaxseed in 1 quart of pure water for 10 minutes
2. Cool and strain
3. Add 1/4 tsp pure Lavender essential oil and shake well.
4. Insert rectally with a syringe, or enema bag, up to 1 pint. Retain as long as possible then let it go. Do this at least 2x a day.
5. Use the preparation within 72 hours.

Lifestyle Factors

Sedentary lifestyle
Lack of exercise
Overwork
Either excessive ejaculation, or excessive arousal with no ejaculation
Diabetes
Smoking (Tobacco and Marijuana)
Drug use: amphetamines, opiates, sympathetic blocker HBP meds, Tagamet (for ulcers),
Kegel exercises to increase pelvic tone, circulation, libido, and staying power.

Materia Medica Listings

By Action

Circulatory Stimulant
Ginger (Zingiber officinale)
Cayenne (Capsicum annuum)
Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis)
Prickly Ash (Zanthoxylum clava-herculitis)
Angelica (Angelica archangelica)
Garlic (Allium sativa)
Sarsaparilla (Smilax spp.)

Urinary Anti-septic
Echinacea (Echinacea purpurea)
Uva-Ursi (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi)
Pipsissewa (Chimaphila umbellata)
Buchu (Barosma crenata)
Oregon Grape (Mahonia aquifolium)

Tonic-Astringent
White Pond Lilly (Nymphaea odorata)
Red Root (Ceanothus spp.)
Oak (Quercus alba)
Sumach (*Rhus typhina*)
Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)
Nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

**Prostate Tonic**
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)
Nettle root (*Urtica dioica*)
Puncture Vine (*Tribulus terrestris*)
Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)
Pumpkin seeds (*Cucurbita pepo*)

**Adaptogen (IE for Libido, low energy, stress, etc.)**
Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*)
Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*)
Ho Shou Wu (*Polygonum multiflorum*)
Schizandra (*Schizandra chinensis*)
Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax racemosa*)
Siberian Ginseng (*Eleutherooccus senticosus*)
Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*)
Cordyceps (*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*)
Pine Pollen (*Pinus spp.*) - I wouldn’t really consider it an adaptogen, but I don’t know what other category to put it in!

**Diuretics**
Nettle leaf (*Urtica dioica*)
Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)
Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*)
Dandelion leaf (*Taraxacum officinale*)
Cornsilk (*Zea mays*)
Couchgrass (*Elymus repens*)

**Demulcents**
Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*)
Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)
Couchgrass (*Elymus repens*)
Cornsilk (*Zea mays*)

**Alteratives**
Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)
Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)
Red Root (*Ceanothus spp.*)
Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)
Poke (*Phytolacca decandra*)
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax spp.*)
Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*)

By Tissue State/Energetics/Endocrine

**Androgen Excess**
Mugwort (*Artemesia vulgaris*)
Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca virosa*)
Madonna Lilly (*Lilium longiflorum*)
Dandelion root (*Taraxacum officinale*)
Blessed Thistle (*Cnicus benedictus*)
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax spp.*)
Licorice (*Glycyrrhiza glabra*)
St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum perforatum*)
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

**Androgen Deficiency**
Pumpkin seed (*Cucurbita pepo*)
Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)
Puncture Vine (*Tribulus terrestris*)
Pine Pollen (*Pinus spp.*)
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax spp.*)
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)

*Saw Palmetto is placed in both of these categories here for a few reasons. 1) It is used for excessive testosterone conversion into DHT in the prostate leading to BPH (IE androgen excess), but 2) it is used for atrophy and wasting of the tissues, low libido, exhaustion and debility, which would be more of an androgen deficiency. Perhaps it is an androgenic adaptogen??*

**Dry/Atrophy**
Oat Grass (not milky oats) (*Avena sativa*)
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)
Burdock (*Arctium lappa*)
Sarsaparilla (*Smilax spp.*)
Blue Vervain (*Verbena hastata*)
Pumpkin seed (*Cucurbita pepo*)
Nettle root (*Urtica dioica*)
Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*)
Marshmallow (*Althea officinalis*)

**Damp/Relaxation**
Red Root (*Ceanothus spp.*)
Oak (*Quercus alba*)
Sumach (*Rhus typhina*)
White Water Lilly (*Nymphaea odorata*)
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Damp/Stagnation
Poke root (*Phytolacca decandra*)
Calendula (*Calendula officinalis*)
Cleavers (*Galium aparine*)
Dandelion leaf and root (*Taraxacum officinale*)

Cold/Depression
Gravelroot (*Eupatorium purpureum*)
Chinese Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*)
Queen Anne’s Lace (*Daucus carota*)

Simple Formulations

Prostate Infection
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) 30%
Echinacea (*Echinacea purpurea*) 30%
Oregon Grape (*Mahonia aquifolium*) 20%
Buchu (*Agathosma betulina*) 20%

Enlarged Prostate
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) 30%
Nettle root (*Urtica dioica*) 30%
Hydrangea (*Hydrangea arborescens*) 20%
Horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*) 20%

Sexual Debility
Saw Palmetto (*Serenoa repens*) 33%
Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*) 33%
Damiana (*Turnera diffusa*) 33%

*Add Milky Oats and Skullcap if there's nervous exhaustion, St. John’s Wort and Rosemary if melancholy, and Siberian Ginseng and Reishi if immunodeficiency, add Prickly Ash or Ginger if circulatory insufficiency.

Impotence with associated Anxiety
Saw Palmetto 50%
Skullcap 25%
Valerian 25%

*Replace Valerian with Passionflower if the constitution is hot. Add Lemon Balm and Tilia if accompanying heart palpitations.

Prostatitis Protocol (from James Green in “The Male Herbal”)
Corn silk (*Zea mays*) 1 part
Couchgrass (*Elymus repens*) 1 part

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Watermelon seeds 1 part

Make an infusion of the herbs and drink 2 cups a day.

Echinacea (Echinacea purpurea) 3 parts
Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens) 3 parts
Marshmallow (Althea officinalis) 1 part
Uva Ursi (Arctostaphylos uva-ursi) 1 part
Horsetail (Equisetum arvense) 1 part
Hydrangea (Hydrangea arborescens) 1 part

Make a decoction of the herbs and drink 2 cups a day. (Note: this formula will likely taste terrible, as Saw Palmetto is... well... not tasty to say the least. Thus, the Saw Palmetto could be taken as a tincture and the rest done as the decoction.)

Men’s Longevity Formula (also from James Green)
Hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna) 4 parts
Ginkgo (Ginkgo biloba) 4 parts
Siberian Ginseng (Eleutherococcus senticosus) 3 parts
Gotu Kola (Centella asiatica) 2 parts
Ho Shou Wu (Polygonum multiflorum) 2 parts
Rosemary (Rosmarinus officinalis) 1 part
Skullcap (Scutellaria lateriflora) 1 part

Infertility Formula
Saw Palmetto (Serenoa repens) 30%
Siberian Ginseng (Eleutherococcus senticosus) 25%
Ho Shou Wu (Polygonum multiflorum) 25%
Sarsaparilla (Smilax racemosa) 10%
Licorice (Glycyrrhiza glabra) 10%

Dribbling Triplet
Sumach (Rhus typhina)
Horsetail (Equisetum arvense)
Oak (Quercus alba)