Saw palmetto (Serenoa repens/ S. serrulata, Sabal serrulata)

**Practice points**

Saw palmetto may improve symptoms of benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) or chronic prostatitis and may be used in conjunction with other medicines to improve benefits. Inconsistent trial results may be due to differences in formulations. Saw palmetto extracts standardised for fatty acids are likely to be more reliable. Unlike other BPH medicines, saw palmetto does not suppress prostate specific antigen (PSA) secretion therefore prostate cancer screening results are not affected.

**Key indications**

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH): In the past Cochrane systematic reviews have reported that saw palmetto improves urinary symptoms and flow in a manner comparable to the 5-alpha-reductase inhibitor finasteride, however, a 2012 update questioned this finding. Since this time additional studies have been published with conflicting results possibly due to variations in methodology, product potency and dose. Some of the positive findings include improvements in International Prostate Symptom Scores (I-PSS), urinary flow rate, post-void residual urine scores, sexual function and quality of life (QoL).

Long term use in BPH: Studies using saw palmetto for 2-10 years have reported improvements in QoL, I-PSS scores, erectile function, urinary flow, residual urinary volume, rate of urination and prostate volume.

In combination for BPH: Some trials have reported additional benefits such as improved QoL and storage symptoms, when saw palmetto is combined with standard BPH treatments (alpha1-blockers e.g. tamsulosin, and 5-alpha-reductase inhibitors e.g. finasteride).

Chronic prostatitis: Saw palmetto alone or in combination with selenium and lycopene may improve symptoms of chronic prostatitis and the addition of saw palmetto to prulifloxacin improves the reduction in prostatitis related pain and urinary symptoms.

**Key actions**

- Anti-inflammatory
- Anti-proliferative
- 5-alpha-reductase inhibition
- Alpha-adrenergic antagonism
- DHT and estrogen receptor inhibition

**Recommended Doses**

Saw palmetto berries are usually administered in their crude form at around 2-4 g/day. However, most clinical trials use standardised liposterolic extracts which are a complex mixture of free fatty acids (80%), their esters (7%), as well as small amounts of sterols and polyprenic compounds.

Liquid saw palmetto supplements contain significantly higher concentrations of fatty acids and phytosterols than powdered extracts, dried berries and tinctures. Liquid liposterolic extracts are available in capsule form for ease of dosing and patient compliance.

BPH: The typical dose used in successful clinical trials is 320mg saw palmetto extract daily. This would be approximately 256 mg fatty acids.
REFERENCES

14. Yeu E, Grostern R. Saw palmetto and intraoperative floppy-iris syndrome which can cause complications during cataract surgery.15

Adverse Effects

Saw palmetto is generally well tolerated. The most commonly reported effects include GIT upset, constipation, nausea and abdominal pain which appear to benefit from taking the herb with food.12

Cautions/ Contraindications

Medical advice should be sought if symptoms worsen, blood is detected in the urine or acute urinary retention occurs.12

Avoid during radiotherapy for prostate cancer as experimental studies indicate that saw palmetto may increase the radiosensitivity of normal prostate cells.12

Possible Interactions

Finasteride: theoretical additive effect with potential benefit

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