

5-Alpha-Reductase Inhibitors (Prostate-Shrinking Pills)

WARWIKI

Patient Information · Pills that gradually shrink an enlarged prostate

5-alpha-reductase inhibitors are pills that **slowly shrink an enlarged prostate (BPH)**, improving urine flow and lowering the chance of urinary blockage and prostate surgery over time. The two are **finasteride (Proscar)** and **dutasteride (Avodart)**. They work gradually — give them several months.

How It Works

These pills block the body's conversion of testosterone into **DHT**, the hormone that drives prostate growth. With less DHT, the prostate **gradually shrinks**, which widens the urine channel. Because shrinking takes time, the full benefit appears over **3–6 months** — they are not a quick fix and are often paired with a fast-acting alpha blocker.

What to Expect

- Best for **larger** prostates; benefit builds over months.
- Taken **once daily**, long-term.
- Over time, they reduce the risk of **urinary retention** and the need for prostate surgery.

LEARN THE TERMS

5-ARI

5-alpha-reductase inhibitor (finasteride, dutasteride).

BPH

Benign prostatic hyperplasia — an enlarged prostate.

DHT

The hormone that drives prostate growth; these pills lower it.

PSA

A prostate blood test; these pills roughly halve the number.

Urinary retention

Being unable to empty the bladder — risk is lowered over time.

Finasteride / dutasteride

The two medicines in this class.

IT AFFECTS YOUR PSA TEST These pills lower your **PSA blood level by about half**. That doesn't harm you, but your doctor needs to know so prostate-cancer screening is read correctly — in general, your PSA result is **doubled** to compare with normal. Make sure every clinician knows you take it.

How to Take It

- **Once daily**, around the same time; be patient — benefit takes months.
- Don't stop just because you don't feel a change early on.
- It's often continued long-term to keep the prostate smaller.

Important Safety

- **Pregnant women should not handle** crushed or broken tablets (risk to a male fetus); the coated whole tablet is fine to handle.
- **Do not donate blood** while taking it and for a period after stopping.
- Tell your team about **mood changes or depression**, which have been reported.

Common Side Effects

- Lower sex drive, erection difficulty, or less ejaculate
- Breast tenderness or enlargement
- Some men report sexual effects that persist — discuss any concerns

Call your team if you have:

- A **breast lump**, pain, or nipple discharge
- New **depression** or mood changes
- You cannot urinate (seek urgent care)

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. 5-ARIs gradually shrink the prostate to improve flow and lower the risk of retention and surgery — give them 3–6 months.
2. They **cut your PSA roughly in half** — make sure your doctor accounts for this when screening for prostate cancer.
3. Pregnant women shouldn't handle broken tablets, and don't donate blood while taking it. Report breast changes or new depression.