

Erectile Dysfunction

What You Should Know

ADULT PEDIATRIC UROLOGY & UROGYNECOLOGY

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*The Official Foundation of the
American Urological Association*

WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)?

ED affects as many as 30 million men. Most men have problems with erections from time to time. In some men, these problems are regular and more severe. ED, or erectile dysfunction, is when it is hard to get or keep an erection that's firm enough for sex.

WHAT CAUSES ED?

While ED becomes more common as men age, growing old is not the cause of the problem. ED can be an early sign of a more serious health problem. Finding and treating the cause(s) of your ED can improve your overall health and well-being.

ED can result from health or emotional problems, or from both combined. Reduced blood flow or harm to nerves in the penis can result in erection problems. These can be caused by heart disease, high blood pressure, high blood sugar, surgery, injuries and even smoking. Some medicine, as well as alcohol or other drugs may also cause erection problems. Emotional (depression, stress or worry) or relationship problems can cause or worsen ED.

ED can be treated safely and treatments work well for most men.

HOW IS ED TREATED?

To improve erection problems, your health care provider may need to treat the root causes. Your provider may ask you to change certain habits, such as stopping smoking, drug or alcohol use. Treating emotional problems, such as relationship conflicts, depression or performance anxiety can also help. Cutting back on or changing certain meds can often improve ED. Do not stop taking your medicine or change any meds without talking to your health care provider first. If a blood test shows low testosterone levels (low T), testosterone replacement therapy (TRT) may help. However, if a blood test shows you have normal testosterone levels, adding TRT will not help your erection problems.

Other treatment choices are:

- Oral drugs, known as PDE-5 inhibitors. These drugs relax muscle cells in the penis and increase blood flow. (These are the drugs you see often on TV and internet ads.)
- A vacuum erection device pulls blood into the penis, causing an erection. An elastic ring is then slipped onto the base of the penis. This holds the blood in the penis (and keeps it hard) for up to 30 minutes.
- Self-injection therapy. By injecting this medication into the penis with a very fine needle, an erection is created.

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- Intraurethral therapy. Patients place a tiny medicated pellet of the drug alprostadil into their urethra. (The urethra is the tube that carries urine out of the body). This causes an erection.
- A urologist can surgically implant one of two types of penile prostheses.

Ask your doctor which treatment is right for you. Dietary supplements (often called “herbal remedies”) for ED are popular but may not be safe or even work. Unlike prescription drugs, they do not have to be proven to work. Check with your health care provider before you take any supplements or medicine to treat your ED.

The good news for many men is that ED can be treated safely, and treatments can work well. If you have ED, there is hope. There is help. Talk to your health care provider to see if one of these treatment choices will work for you.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

- What is ED?
- What causes ED?
- Can ED be prevented?
- Can you help me or do I need to see a specialist in ED? If so, how can I find the right one for me?
- Will I need to have tests to find out what is causing my ED?
- Would you explain each test and why you are recommending them?
- What types of treatment are available for ED?
- Are there side effects from treatment?
- What are the pros and cons of each type of treatment?
- What treatment do you recommend for me and why?
- What happens if the first treatment doesn't help?
- Are there any lifestyle changes I can make that could help my symptoms?

ED is treatable at all ages.

RESOURCES

American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists

Find a certified sex therapist/counselor near you www.aasect.org, click on “Locate a Professional”

Frank Talk

Peer support to help men deal with ED
www.FrankTalk.org

Hormone Health Network

In English: www.hormone.org/diseases-and-conditions/mens-health/erectile-dysfunction

In Spanish: www.hormone.org/audiencias/pacientes-y-cuidadores/preguntas-y-respuestas/2012/erectile-dysfunction

National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NKUDIC)

In English: <http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/KUDiseases/pubs/ED/index.aspx>

In Spanish: <http://kidney.niddk.nih.gov/Spanish/pubs/ED/index.aspx>

Sexual Medicine Society of North America

www.sexhealthmatters.org

Urology Care Foundation

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