

# Erectile Dysfunction

## SEXUAL HEALTH SERIES

### WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION?

Studies show that about one half of American men over age 40 have a problem getting or keeping an erection that's firm enough for sexual satisfaction. Most men have difficulties with erections from time to time. In some men, it is a regular, more severe problem known as erectile dysfunction, or ED.

### 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 warning sign of a more serious illness. Diagnosing and treating the condition that causes ED can improve your overall well-being, as well as help restore your sexual health.

ED can result from physical, medical or psychological factors, or a combination of factors. Heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, surgery, injuries and even smoking can reduce blood flow or damage nerves in the penis. Some prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as alcohol or other drugs, may cause erectile difficulties as a side effect. Many emotional (depression, stress or anxiety) or relationship problems can cause or worsen ED. A medical professional diagnoses ED through a physical examination.

### HOW IS ED TREATED?

To improve erectile function your doctor may treat underlying causes. These may include recommending you change certain habits, such as stopping drug or alcohol use. Treating mental health problems, such as relationship conflicts, depression or performance anxiety can also help. If ED is a side effect of a prescribed medication you are taking, your doctor may be able to adjust the dose of your medication or switch you to a different drug. Do not stop taking your medicine or change any medications without talking to your doctor first. If a blood test shows low testosterone levels testosterone replacement therapy may help.

Other treatment options include:

- Oral medications known as phosphodiesterase type 5 (PDE-5) inhibitors, which relax muscle cells in the penis for better blood flow. This produces a rigid erection when sexual stimulation occurs.
- A vacuum erection device which draws blood into the penis, causing an erection to form. Once an erection occurs, an elastic ring at the base of the penis holds the blood in the penis for up to 30 minutes.
- Self-injection therapy which uses a fine needle to place a small amount of medication into the base of the penis before sexual activity to produce an erection.

## FACT SHEET

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- With intraurethral therapy, a man inserts a tiny medicated pellet of alprostadil into his urethra to create an erection.
- A urologist can surgically insert one of two types of penile implants.

Ask your doctor which treatment is right for you. Popular natural or herbal medications and supplements claim to promote sexual health and improve erectile function. Check with your doctor

before you take any over-the-counter supplements or medications to treat your ED.

The good news for many men is that ED can be treated, safely and effectively. If you have ED, there is hope. There is help. Talk to your healthcare provider to see if one of these options will work for you.

**This urologic information was provided to you by:**

For more information about ED, please visit the AUA Foundation's website, [www.UrologyHealth.org](http://www.UrologyHealth.org) or call the National Urology Health Line at 1-800-828-7866 for assistance in English and Spanish.

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This information is based on current medical and scientific knowledge and is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please see your urologist or other healthcare provider regarding any health concerns and always consult a healthcare professional before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

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# Diagnosing Erectile Dysfunction

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### WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION?

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is the problem of getting or keeping an erection that's firm enough for sexual satisfaction. ED can result from physical, medical or psychological factors, or a combination of factors. ED can be an early warning sign of a more serious illness, such as heart disease, high blood pressure or diabetes mellitus. *Diagnosing and treating the conditions that cause ED* can improve your overall well-being, as well as help restore your sexual health.

### HOW IS ED DIAGNOSED?

If you are not able to have an erection firm enough for sexual satisfaction, you have ED. Finding the cause of the ED will help your healthcare provider determine the best treatment options. Most medical professionals will ask questions about your medical and psychological history, conduct a physical examination and possibly recommend some laboratory tests.

- **Medical and Sexual History:** Questions about your medical history can help identify diseases that may lead to ED, while asking questions about sexual history might help find problems with sexual desire, erection, ejaculation, or orgasm. Using certain prescription or illegal drugs can suggest a chemical cause, since drug effects account for 25 percent of ED cases. Cutting back on or substituting certain medications can often improve ED.
- **Physical Examination:** A physical examination checks overall health and can give clues to the cause of ED.

- **Laboratory Tests:** Tests for possible diseases that cause ED may include blood counts, urinalysis, lipid profile, testosterone levels and other laboratory tests.
- **Psychosocial Examination:** An interview and/or questionnaire can be used to identify psychological factors that may contribute to ED. A man's sexual partner may also be interviewed to determine expectations and perceptions during sexual intercourse.

### WHAT INFORMATION SHOULD YOU GIVE YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER?

To help your healthcare professional find the best way to treat your ED, be prepared to answer questions about: your erections, your medical history, any medications and drugs or alcohol you may use. Sometimes these questions may seem personal or embarrassing. Honest answers will help find the cause and best treatment for your ED.

#### Questions relating to your ED:

- How long have these symptoms been present? Did they begin gradually or suddenly?
- Do you wake up with an erection? How about in the evening?
- If you do have erections, how firm are they? Is penetration difficult?
- Do your erections change at different times such as with different partners, oral stimulation or masturbation?
- Do you have difficulties with sexual desire (libido), arousal, ejaculation, or orgasm (climax)?

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- What effect is this problem having on your sexual satisfaction, your sexual confidence, or your relationship if you are in one?

**Questions relating to medical factors that could be contributing to ED:**

- What medical conditions do you have?
- What medications are you currently taking?
- If and how much do you smoke, drink, or use other drugs?
- Did you have any previous history of surgery or radiation therapy, particularly in the pelvic region?
- Do you experience urinary problems?

**Questions relating to psychosocial factors that could be contributing to ED:**

- How is your relationship with your partner? Has anything changed recently?
- What is your sex life like? Has anything changed recently?
- In general, are you under a lot of stress? Or has anything particularly upsetting happened to you?
- Do you have any psychological illnesses or depression?

The good news for many men is that ED can be prevented or treated, safely and effectively. If you have ED, there is hope. There is help. Talk to your healthcare provider about ED prevention and treatment options.

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