

Beyond Viagra: Help for ED

Q: What is the medical definition of erectile dysfunction?

A: Erectile dysfunction, commonly called ED or impotence, is the inability to achieve and sustain an erection suitable for sexual intercourse.

For most men, having trouble from time to time isn't necessarily a cause for concern. But if erectile dysfunction is an ongoing problem, it can cause devastating stress, affect relationships, and lower self-confidence.

Studies show that as men age, most will eventually suffer some form of ED. According to statistics, about 25 percent of men 65 years and older experience ED regularly.

Q: What are the causes of ED?

A: These include decreased blood flow into the penis, problems with the nervous system, or low serum testosterone levels.

Other physical causes can be atherosclerosis or hardening of the arteries, diabetes, smoking, and side effects from certain medications. People with injuries of the nervous system or who have spinal cord damage may also experience

ED as well as men who have had prostate or rectal surgery. Alcohol and drug abuse can also contribute to the problem. Psychological factors like depression and stress can lead to ED. Men with ED can find themselves in the middle of a vicious cycle.

The more they experience impotency, the more they become anxious about their performance. This leads to more episodes of ED. That's why I encourage them to seek help as soon as possible.

Less than one third of men who suffer sexual dysfunction discuss the problem with their health care professionals, and that's a shame. There's no need to suffer in silence.

Q: How is ED treated?

A: We have oral medications like Viagra, Cialis, and Levitra that all work the same way. While they don't cure ED, they increase blood flow to the penis.

We also have vacuum devices, sometimes called penis pumps, which draw blood into the penis.

There are injections of the drug alprostadil (brand names Edex and Impulse) that produce an erection that lasts an hour.

The drug is also available in a suppository that's placed into the penile urethra. Penile implants also are effective for many men.

If the patient has low serum testosterone, hormone replacement may help. An all-natural supplement called Protandim is helpful in treating ED because it reduces oxidative stress on the body and keeps cells healthier.

Q: Are many women affected by sexual dysfunction?

A: Surveys show that 43 percent of women over 40 are unhappy with their sex life. They may experience a decrease in desire, pain during sex, lack of orgasm, and a decrease in sexual sensation as they get older.

Menopause is a common cause of female dysfunction, but diabetes, heart disease, neurological conditions and hormone imbalances are other factors. Like men, some medications, alcohol and drug abuse can contribute to the problem. For women, we focus on changes that normally occur with aging. Hormone therapy often is effective.

Q: What new treatments are on the horizon?

A: Our team at the Western Institute for Sexual Health is investigating the use of cardiovascular stents to be placed in the penile arteries to enhance blood flow.

We have also developed a program to deal with the psychological issues such as reducing anxiety. This psychosexual evaluation helps partners understand each other's needs clearly and openly.

The bottom line is that most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable.

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