



Erectile Dysfunction: What You Should Know

Urology Care
FOUNDATION™
*The Official Foundation of the
American Urological Association*

WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)?

ED, or erectile dysfunction, is when a man finds it hard to get or keep an erection that's firm enough for sex. It affects about one (1) out of two (2) men over the age of 50. In some, ED only happens from time to time. In others, it is a more severe problem.

WHAT CAUSES ED?

While ED is more common as men age, growing old is not the cause. ED can signal an underlying health and/or emotional problem. Finding and treating the cause(s) of your ED can improve your overall health and your sex life.

ED happens when blood doesn't flow well to the penis, or when the nerves in the penis are harmed. ED can be caused by injury, surgery, heart disease, peripheral arterial disease or high blood pressure. It can be due to high blood sugar, alcohol, drugs or smoking. Some medicines may also cause ED. Emotional stress (depression, anxiety or relationship problems) can cause or worsen ED.

HOW IS ED TREATED?

Your healthcare provider will want to evaluate your physical and emotional health before choosing treatment. You may be asked to change your lifestyle habits or the medicines you use first. For example, you may be asked to lose weight or exercise more. You may be asked to stop smoking, vaping or using drugs or alcohol. You may be offered a different type or dose of a medicine you already take. Never make changes to medicines without first talking to your provider.

At the same time, your provider will want you to address any emotional problems you may be having. These could stem from relationships, work, stress, depression or anxiety from past problems with ED (performance anxiety). Your healthcare provider may offer a referral to counseling for a more serious mental health concern.

After lifestyle changes, the most common treatment choices are:

- **Vacuum Erection Devices** are pumps to help build and keep an erection; they do not need a prescription.
- **PDE-5 Inhibitors** such as Avanafil, Sildenafil, Tadalafil and Vardenafil increase penile blood flow. A prescription is needed.
- **Testosterone Therapy** may be prescribed to help your sex drive if low levels of testosterone are found in blood tests.
- **Intracavernosal (ICI) or Intraurethral (IU) Therapy** involves prescribed drugs you deliver directly to the penis to improve blood flow and produce an erection. This is an option for men who don't or can't respond well to PDE-5 inhibitors.
- **Surgery** to insert penile implants should be done by a urologist experienced with penile surgery.
- **Dietary Supplements** ("herbal remedies") are popular, but may not be safe or even work. Check with your healthcare provider before you take any to self-treat your ED. The FDA warns consumers not to use unapproved drugs for ED: <https://www.fda.gov/ForConsumers/ConsumerUpdates/ucm465024.htm>

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The good news for many men is that ED can be managed safely and treatments can work well. Talk with your healthcare provider to see what treatment will work best for you. Be sure to ask questions about side effects, underlying health problems or other concerns before you begin.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER

- What causes ED?
- What tests will I need to find the underlying cause of my ED?
- Can I do anything to prevent ED?
- Can you help me, or should I see a specialist? (ask for a referral if needed)
- What treatments can help me? What are the side effects, pros and cons of each?
- What happens if the first treatment doesn't help?
- If surgery is my best choice, can I talk first to a patient that you've helped?
- Could you give me the name of a sex therapist or counselor to help me?

About the Urology Care Foundation

The Urology Care Foundation is the world's leading urologic foundation – and the official foundation of the American Urological Association. We provide information for those actively managing their urologic health and those ready to make health changes. Our information is based on the American Urological Association resources and is reviewed by medical experts.

To learn more, visit the Urology Care Foundation's website, UrologyHealth.org/UrologicConditions or go to UrologyHealth.org/FindAUrologist to find a doctor near you.

Disclaimer:

This information 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 talk to your urologists or healthcare provider about your health concerns. Always consult a healthcare provider before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

For copies of printed materials about Erectile Dysfunction and other urologic conditions, visit UrologyHealth.org/Order or call 800-828-7866.