

Erectile Dysfunction: Diagnosis

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 from an injury, surgery, heart disease, peripheral arterial disease or high blood pressure. It can be due to high blood sugar, alcohol and drugs or smoking. Some medicines may cause ED. Emotional stress (depression, anxiety or relationship problems) can also lead to or worsen ED.

HOW IS ED DIAGNOSED?

Finding the cause of your ED is the first step in finding the right treatment. Most healthcare providers will ask you about your general health and your erection problem. They may also give you a physical exam and order lab tests.

Tell them about your experience so your provider can learn if your ED stems from your desire for sex, erection function,

ejaculation or orgasm (climax). Several things are considered before making a diagnosis:

- **Health and ED History:** Background about your health history and lifestyle can lead your provider to answers. It is very important to tell him/her about medicines you take (both prescription and over-the-counter). If you smoke, tell how much. If you drink, tell how much. Your healthcare provider will also ask about recent stressors in your life and about other health problems.
- **Physical Exam:** The physical exam is a way to check your total health. Based on your age and risk factors, the exam may focus on your heart and blood system, as well as your prostate. For ED, it often starts with an exam of your genitals (penis and testicles).
- **Lab Tests:** Your healthcare provider may order blood tests and collect a urine sample to look for other health problems not found through the other tests.
- **Advanced Erectile Function Tests:** For some men, specialized testing may be done. For example, an ultrasonography (Penile Doppler), pelvic x-ray, sleep test other blood tests may be necessary.
- **Stress and Emotional Health:** Your healthcare provider may ask you questions about your feelings of depression or worry. He/she may also ask about any problems in your relationship with a partner. Some providers may offer you the name of a sex therapist or health counselor.

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WHAT WILL BE DISCUSSED DURING MY VISIT?

Be ready to answer a number of questions. Some of these questions will be personal and may seem embarrassing. Honest answers will help you and your doctor find the cause and best treatment for your ED.

Questions about your ED symptoms:

- How long have you had these symptoms? Did they start slowly or all at once?
- Do you wake in the morning or during the night with an erection?
- If you do have erections, how firm are they? Is penetration difficult?
- Do you have problems with your sex drive or arousal?
- Do your erections change at different times--like when entering a partner, during oral sex or with masturbation?
- Do you have pain with erections?
- Do you have problems with ejaculation or orgasm (climax)?
- Do you feel a lump in the penis or have a curved penis? (These are signs of Peyronie's Disease which needs an expert in urology to assess and treat the problem.)

Questions about your general health:

- What prescription drugs, over-the-counter drugs or supplements do you take?
- Do you use recreational drugs?
- Do you smoke or vape? What do you smoke, and how much?
- How much alcohol do you drink?
- Have you had surgery or radiation therapy in the pelvic area?
- Do you have any urinary problems?
- Do you have other health problems (treated or untreated)?

Questions about your stress and emotional health:

- Are you often under a lot of stress, or has something recently upset you?

- Does anything cause you to feel anxious or depressed? Do you have a mental health issue?
- Are you taking any drugs for your mental health?
- How satisfied are you with your sex life? Has there been any change lately?
- How is your relationship with your partner? Has there been any change lately?

The good news for many men is ED can be prevented or treated safely. If you have ED, there is help. Talk with your healthcare provider about ED prevention and treatment choices.

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 ED and other urologic conditions, visit UrologyHealth.org/Order or call 800-828-7866.