

Diagnosing Erectile Dysfunction

What You Should Know



WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED)?

Most men have problems with erections from time to time. But some men have erectile dysfunction, or ED. When you have ED, it is hard to get or keep an erection that's firm enough for sex. ED can be caused when health problems prevent good blood flow or damage nerves in the penis. ED can also be caused by stress or emotional reasons, or by a combination of health and emotional reasons. ED can be an early warning of a more serious illness. Heart disease, high blood pressure and high blood sugar can all cause ED. Finding and treating the cause(s) of your ED can improve your overall health and well-being.

HOW IS ED DIAGNOSED?

Finding the cause of your ED will help your health care provider find the best treatment choices for you. Most health care providers will ask you about your health and about the history of your erection problem. They may also give you a physical exam and order lab tests.

- **Health and ED History:** Questions about your health history can help find diseases that may lead to ED. It can also find medicine or drug use that can cause ED. Cutting back on or changing certain meds can often improve ED. Your health care provider will also ask if you smoke or drink because that can affect erections. Asking questions about your history of ED can help your provider find out whether your problems are with sexual desire, erection, ejaculation, or orgasm (climax).

- **Physical Exam:** A physical exam checks overall health and includes a check of your penis. Both can give clues to the cause of ED.
- **Lab Tests:** To test for diseases that cause ED, your health care provider may order blood tests and collect a urine sample.
- **Stress and Emotional Health:** Your health care provider may ask you questions about feelings such as depression or worry. They may also ask about problems in your relationship with a partner. All of these can make ED worse. Some health care providers may ask if it is okay to talk to your sexual partner, also.

WHAT WILL YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER ASK?

To help your health care provider find the best way to treat your ED, be ready to answer a number of questions. Some of these questions will be personal and may seem embarrassing. Honest answers will help find the cause and best treatment for your ED.

Questions about your ED:

- How long have you had these symptoms? Did they start slowly or all at once?
- Do you wake up with an erection? How about in the evening?
- If you do have erections, how firm are they? Is penetration difficult?

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- Do your erections change at different times such as when entering a partner, during stimulation by mouth or with masturbation?
- Do you have problems with sex drive, arousal, ejaculation, or orgasm (climax)?
- What effect is this problem having on your enjoyment of sex?
- What effect is this problem having on your relationship if you are in one?

Questions about health problems:

- What health problems do you have?
- What medicines do you take?
- Do you smoke, drink, or use other drugs? If so, how much?
- Did you have any prior history of surgery or radiation therapy, especially in the pelvic area?
- Do you have urinary problems?

Questions about stress and emotional health:

- How is your relationship with your partner? Has anything changed lately?
- How satisfied are you with your sex life? Has anything changed lately?
- Are you under a lot of stress most of the time? Or has anything especially upsetting happened to you?
- Do you have any mental illnesses or depression? Are you taking any medications for depression or anxiety?

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

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER

- What is ED and what causes it? 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?
- 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?

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

UrologyHealth.org

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