



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. ED is also damage to the erectile tissue/muscle of the penis. 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 make ED worse.

How Do You Lower Your Risk of Getting Ed?

Taking active steps to prevent ED may help your sexual function and improve your general health. The best things you can do are:

- Exercise regularly
- Keep or get to a healthy weight
- Avoid smoking or vaping
- Limit drinking alcohol (two drinks or less per day)

- Avoid using illegal drugs
- Adjust your medicines if needed (never make changes without first talking to your doctor)
- Adopt better sleep habits (7-8 hours per night is ideal)
- Take care of other health problems like high blood sugar and heart, artery or kidney disease (work with your doctor to regain health)

If you do have ED, talk to your healthcare provider to learn why it's happening and how to find the best treatment.

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

National Headquarters: 1000 Corporate Boulevard, Linthicum, MD 21090
Phone: 410-689-3990 • 1-800-828-7866 • info@UrologyCareFoundation.org • www.UrologyHealth.org

 UrologyCareFoundation  @UrologyCareFdn  @UrologyCareFdn  UrologyCareFoun

Erectile Dysfunction:

What You Should Know

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 or 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.

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 come 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 create 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 who has experience 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>

The good news for many men is 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 start.

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/Download or call 800-828-7866.