Help for Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction (ED), when a man can't get an erection hard enough for sex, affects 30 million American men and their partners.

Illness, medical treatment, psychological factors or a com-

bination of these can cause ED. For example, it can be triggered by diabetes, alcoholism, certain antidepressants and psychological factors such as anxiety, depression and loss of self-confidence.

Whatever the cause, many men are embarrassed to talk about ED with their health care providers and even with their own partners. If you or your partner are experiencing ED, remember, it's nobody's fault, it's a medical condition. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

The good news is that ED can be treated. Throughout the treatment process, make sure that you and your partner discuss your feelings about ED and work hard to be sensitive to each other's feelings.

What Treatments Are Available?

Lifestyle changes and treatments can help men overcome ED. Discuss the options with your PA. If the first treatment doesn't work, don't be discouraged. Some men need to try a few different treatments before finding the one that works best for them. Here are some of the options:

Changing Habits and Medications

Quitting smoking can be an important step in stopping ED. Changing prescription medications, if possible, also may help.

Hormone Medication

Only 5% of ED cases are caused by irregular levels of sex hormones in the body. But for these men, special medications often can restore a healthy hormone balance.

Professional Counseling

A combination of psychological and physical factors often causes ED. So, counseling, frequently combined with other treatments, can help. The goal is to lessen anxiety, which can stop or reduce ED.

Vacuum Devices

With these devices, a man inserts his penis into a

plastic cylinder, which is then pumped to create a vacuum. When he gets an erection, he slips a rubber ring around the base of his penis to maintain the erection and then he removes the cylinder. The erection usually lasts long enough for sex.

Injection Therapy

Several injectable medications help increase blood flow to the penis to help a man get an erection. A man himself injects the medication into the side of his penis. The injection is relatively painless and produces erections for as many as 80% of patients.

Implants

This treatment is not recommended until other methods have been tried first. Surgeons implant a device into the two sides of the penis, allowing erections as often as desired.

Drug Therapy

Taking a pill 30 minutes to an hour before sex can boost the effects of a chemical in the body that relaxes muscles in the penis during sexual excitement, allowing increased blood flow. Many men like the "naturalness" and privacy of this method—it creates an erection in response to sexual stimulation and nobody else has to know.

Surgery

The most common surgical options for ED are implanting a device and rebuilding arteries to increase the blood flow to the penis.

With flexible implants, a man can manually adjust the position of the penis. With inflatable implants, a man creates an erection by activating a small pump implanted in the scrotum. Possible problems with implants include infection and mechanical breakdown, although mechanical problems are now less common because of technological advances.

Surgery can reduce ED caused by blockages in the arteries. The best candidates for this surgery are young men with isolated blockage of an artery because of trauma to the genitals or a hip fracture. The procedure is not as successful in older men with extensive blockage.

Talk with your PA for more information. You *can* overcome ED. ■



Your physician assistant has given you this patient education handout to further explain or remind you about an issue related to your health. This handout is a general guide only. If you have specific questions, discuss them with your PA.

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