

Erectile Dysfunction: What is it?

If a man has trouble getting or keeping an erection, this problem is called **Erectile Dysfunction** or **ED** for short.

ED can happen when there is not enough blood flow to the penis, or when muscles do not work properly to trap and release blood in the penis. This condition not only affects the person, but also his partner.

What causes an erection?

When the brain senses something arousing, it sends chemical messages to control the nerves, hormones, blood vessels and muscles that cause an erection. These areas of the body work together to increase blood flow into the penis. The trapped blood helps make the penis hard enough for sexual activity. As long as there is sexual stimulation, the erection can be kept until ejaculation or orgasm. If any part of the system does not work properly, a normal erection will not happen.

What causes Erectile Dysfunction?

Most men have trouble getting or keeping an erection at some time in their life. Being too tired, stressed or drinking too much alcohol can cause a short-term problem. A temporary problem getting an erection is not the same as erectile dysfunction. If the problem continues or happens often and causes problems with normal sexual activity, medical attention should be the next step.

Physical problems are a more common reason for ED. Some of the physical causes include:

- Conditions that cause blood vessels to be blocked such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Neurological diseases
- Injury or surgery to the pelvic area
- Long-term smoking history
- Drug or alcohol abuse
- Hormone disorders
- Some prescription drugs
- Lack of exercise or being inactive

Other problems that may cause ED include:

- Stress or anxiety
- Performance anxiety – worry about failing to have a satisfactory erection
- Depression
- Having a troubled relationship
- Financial difficulties

What if I find it difficult to talk about Erectile Dysfunction?

Talk to your doctor about erectile dysfunction if this is a problem for you. ED can happen in men of all ages, and the rate increases as you get older. Most men may start to struggle with some form of ED around the age of 40. It is normal for healthy men to notice a decrease in the quality and frequency of their erections and they may find it takes more stimulation to get an erection. There are different treatments to help men with ED.

Questions to ask yourself about Erectile Dysfunction

Here are five questions to ask yourself. If you answer “no” to some of these, then you should contact your doctor or a Urologist for further evaluation.

1. Do you feel confident that you can get and keep an erection?
2. Are your erections usually hard enough so you can penetrate (enter) your partner?

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3. Are you able to keep your erection after you have penetrated (entered) your partner?
4. When you have sex, are you able to keep your erection until you complete sexual intercourse?
5. When having sexual intercourse, is it satisfactory to you?

Treatment for Erectile Dysfunction

The good news is that erectile dysfunction can be treated in most cases. There are now new and better ways to assess and treat ED. It is important to make an appointment with your doctor as soon as the problem starts, because often ED will not just go away.

To make an appointment with the OSU Wexner Medical Center Erectile Dysfunction Clinic call (614) 293-8155.