

Erectile Dysfunction

What is Erectile Dysfunction?

Erections are created when a man is aroused physically or mentally. His nervous system sends messages to the penis that cause blood to rush to the area and fill the erectile chambers within the shaft of the penis. Back flow valves in the penis veins then close, trapping the blood in the penis to firmly hold an erection in place.

With erectile dysfunction (ED), arteries are not able to get enough blood to the penis, or the back-flow valves in the penis veins allow blood to leak out of the penis. As a result, the penis is not able to attain or sustain is the inability to get and keep an erection firm enough for sex.

Sometimes an erection can be attained, but the quality of the erection is not suitable enough for intercourse. Both situations are considered ED. Erectile dysfunction is incredibly common, affecting 40% of men over age 40, and it can be caused by several factors:

Physical causes of erectile dysfunction

In many cases, erectile dysfunction is caused by something physical. Common causes include:

- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Diabetes
- Clogged blood vessels (atherosclerosis)
- High cholesterol
- Obesity
- Parkinson's disease

- Multiple sclerosis
- Certain prescription medications
- Tobacco use
- Peyronie's disease — development of scar tissue inside the penis
- Alcoholism and other forms of substance abuse
- Sleep disorders
- Treatments for prostate cancer or enlarged prostate
- Surgeries or injuries that affect the pelvic area or spinal cord

Psychological causes of erectile dysfunction

The brain plays a key role in triggering the series of physical events that cause an erection, starting with feelings of sexual excitement. A number of things can interfere with sexual feelings and cause or worsen erectile dysfunction. These include:

- Depression, anxiety or other mental health conditions
- Relationship problems due to stress, poor communication or other concerns
- An unsatisfactory sex life
- Stress or anxiety
- Embarrassment or low self-esteem

Prevention

The best way to prevent erectile dysfunction is to make healthy lifestyle choices and to manage any existing health conditions. For example:

- Work with your doctor to manage diabetes, heart disease or other chronic health conditions.

- See your doctor for regular checkups and medical screening tests.
- Stop smoking, limit or avoid alcohol, and don't use illegal drugs.
- Exercise regularly.
- Take steps to reduce stress.
- Get help for anxiety, depression or other mental health concerns.

Treatment for ED

ED is a real health issue that is diagnosable and treatable, and there are many solutions available.

- **Counseling** can often fix ED that is rooted in psychological causes.
- **Oral medications** can be taken to treat ED caused by medical conditions; however, they are often not as effective as the popular commercials may lead people to believe. Up to 30% of men do not have success with this option. Others experience severe side effects, and others are not able to attain a firm enough erection no matter the dosage.
- **Injection therapy** is another prescribed treatment, in which the patient uses a needle to inject medication directly into his penis to stimulate blood flow and keep the blood in the penis.
- More aggressive forms of treatment such as **surgical implants** can treat ED, but they are being prescribed less and less because there are other as effective and less evasive treatments available.
- **Vacuum therapy systems** or medical vacuum pumps, often called “Penis Pumps,” are a solution that is becoming increasingly popular. Vacuum therapy uses the laws of physics to mimic the natural process a man’s body goes through when it creates an erection. *These systems are a cost-effective, natural, and spontaneous answer to ED that requires no prescription.*