

# Men's health

## Sexual healing

You've probably seen the emails: 'scientific breakthrough', 'miraculous cure', 'secret ingredient' or even more lurid subject headings relating to Erectile Dysfunction (ED). *Kate Johnston* pursues the truth about this delicate subject.

If you're one of 33 per cent of men aged 50–59 or 51 per cent aged 60–69 who at different times has had concerns about your sexual capacity, you're clearly not alone.

Almost every man has times when his erection isn't as strong as he'd like. But when does it become more of a problem? If you sense things aren't working as well as they could, don't wait too long before seeking professional advice. Many men will put off doing anything about their health in the hope that whatever it is will go away or fix itself. This is an immaculate misconception. Try taking the attitude, 'if it's a bit broke, fix it'. A little bit of embarrassment is easily compensated for by an active sex life.

It doesn't take a scientific study to know that sex is good for your health. But did you know that in 75–80 per cent of cases the cause of ED is not only purely mechanical but can also be related to ill health? In fact, ED itself can be a symptom of other health problems. So before you start blaming yourself, your partner or anyone else, have a full health check – a change of medication, high blood pressure, prostate issues, heart disorders or diabetes can all alter sexual functioning.

### ED or impotence?

There's not much difference between impotence and ED but impotence encompasses a wider range of problems that interfere with satisfying sex, such as a lack of desire or trouble with ejaculation or orgasm. ED is more about the mechanical inability to get an erection, an inconsistency of erections or

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a tendency to sustain only brief erections. Both impotence and ED can be caused by a blend of psychological and physical issues, but in the case of ED, the latter are the more likely culprits.

Remember, it's perfectly normal for the strength of erections to change over time. It can be frustrating and demoralising, but if you want an improvement – and who wouldn't? – be upfront and honest. If you don't want to see your family doctor, fair

enough. Contact a local sexual health clinic or call an anonymous helpline (see MORE box).

### Treatments

There are a number of treatments for ED: drugs (oral or injected), constriction devices, surgical implants or vascular reconstruction surgery.

### Drugs

The three main drugs on the market are Viagra, Cialis (se-ah-lis) and Levitra (la veetra). Other products may be bad for your health and end up making things worse. And be sure to tell the doctor treating you for ED about any other medications you are taking, as some treatments for angina, for instance, aren't a good mix with ED drugs.

Don't believe the urban myths that these drugs will give you a permanent erection. You'll still need to be stimulated and it can take about half an hour for them to start working. One common mistake is taking an incorrect dose (usually too much rather than not enough!), which can cause disappointment and further frustration. Always keep to the dose set by your health professional, and then follow up if it doesn't work.



Some men share impotence medication. Bad idea. The drugs should be taken on prescription only and purchased through a pharmacy. Ask your doctor about side effects – some men experience headaches, urinary tract infections and diarrhoea. It's up to you to decide if it's worth it.

If oral drugs don't work, you could consider injections, which directly open up the blood vessels of the penis.

### Devices

Vacuum devices work for more than 90 per cent of men, although they can take a bit of getting used to. In a few minutes you should have an erection. The plastic

cylinder works by drawing blood into the penis; the blood is then trapped there by placing a rubber constriction ring around the base of the penis.

### Implants

Surgical implants create an erection when fluid from a reservoir at the base of the scrotum is pumped into cylinders that have been implanted in the penis. Be aware that the procedure is expensive and takes away any chance of getting a natural erection again. Therefore, implants should be considered the final frontier.

Vascular surgery is another 'last resort' option. A bit like heart bypass surgery, it re-routes the blood supply around blockages.

### All in the mind?

Depression, illness, problems at work or financial difficulties don't always make for an easy segue into the bedroom. Even plain old nerves can dampen the atmosphere. And every bloke knows that too much alcohol can ruin the fun. If your romance needs a spark or you or your partner needs to get 'back on track' post surgery or traumatic experience, sexual health

counsellors can help. You'll find a list of private therapists in the telephone directory. The web is, of course, full of information, although in the end it's best to eschew the DIY method and actually talk to someone. [YL](#)

### → MORE

**Impotence Australia** is a not-for-profit organisation set up to help men and their partners manage impotence through telephone counselling. The website includes where to find a practitioner and a link to Radio IA, the first internet men's health radio station. Ph Helpline 1800 800 614  
Web [www.impotenceaustralia.com.au](http://www.impotenceaustralia.com.au)

**HealthInsite** is the Australian government website which offers health information on a range of topics, including men's sexual health, ED and impotence.  
Web [www.healthinsite.gov.au](http://www.healthinsite.gov.au)

**Andrology Australia** is the Australian Centre for Excellence in male reproductive health, offering services and information to the community and health professionals. The former Australian cricketer Merv Hughes, is their spokesperson.  
Ph 1300 303 878  
Web [www.andrologyaustralia.org](http://www.andrologyaustralia.org)

### If the drugs don't work...

... ask yourself:

- Have you involved your partner in discussions?
- Are you taking the correct dose?
- Are you stressed?
- Did you wait long enough after taking the tablet before having sex?
- Was your prescription filled out by a legitimate source?