

### Erectile Dysfunction: Starting the Conversation

Erectile dysfunction, also called ED, means a man cannot get or keep an erection. ED affects most men at some time. It can occur at any age, but ED becomes more common as men get older. Several treatments can help.

#### What makes an erection happen?

When you are sexually aroused, your penis becomes hard so you can have sex. Sexual arousal begins in your brain, which sends messages through nerves from your spinal cord to the arteries that supply your penis with blood. These nerves “tell” your blood vessels to relax so more blood can flow into your penis, making it swell and become erect and hard. After orgasm, the process is reversed, and your penis becomes soft again.

**Did you know?** The increased blood flow you need for an erection is about the same as what your heart needs during a cardio workout.

#### What's normal for my age?

About 10% of men in their 30s have problems getting an erection. That number goes up to 40% for men in their 40s, and to nearly 70% for men in their 70s.

When you're younger, sexual arousal results in very firm erections multiple times a day. As you get older, even if you're very fit, your ability to get and keep an erection may not happen as often because the “recovery time” increases.

In your 40s and 50s, you should be able to achieve a strong erection that lasts to orgasm, but this probably won't happen as often as when you were younger. As you get older, your erections may not be as hard, and the force of your orgasm and ejaculation may not be as robust.

Unless you have other health problems, you should not completely lose the ability to get an erection.

#### What causes ED?

Most of the time, the causes of ED are physical, but sometimes emotional factors such as stress, anxiety, or depression play a role, especially in younger men.

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## Men's Sexual and Urinary Health: ED

Anything that reduces blood flow or interferes with your nerves will affect your erections. That includes:

- Circulation problems
- Diabetes
- Excess weight
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- High cholesterol
- Problems with hormones, including low testosterone, thyroid disorders, or liver disease
- Smoking, alcohol/drug abuse

Stress and anxiety also cause ED by triggering production of adrenaline. Adrenaline increases blood flow to the brain and heart, but reduces it to the penis. ED can also be a side effect of some prescription medicines, such as those for high blood pressure or depression.

**Did you know?** ED may be the first sign of a medical problem. A study of 36,744 men found that compared with men who didn't have ED, those with it were 48% more likely to develop heart disease, 35% more likely to have a stroke, and 19% more likely to die.

*If you're concerned about ED, talk with your doctor about it and the variety of treatments and lifestyle changes that can help.*