

# Erectile Dysfunction



## What is it?

**This is a condition whereby your erections are not hard enough for sexual intercourse. It can be common as a man ages.**

## What are the causes?

The commonest causes are due to poor blood flow through the blood vessels transporting blood to the penis. This is similar to what happens in the blood vessels in the heart which subsequently result in heart attacks. It can also be caused by damage to the nerves following some types of surgery or radiotherapy, low testosterone or severely stressful environments or relationships.

The commonest causes are:

- Smoking
- Raised BMI
- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Surgery or radiotherapy involving the prostate, lower bowel, bladder
- Low testosterone
- Some types of medications or recreational drugs

## What can I do to improve the condition?

The most important thing you can do is to seek help from a medical specialist. However reducing stresses where possible, reduce weight if overweight, smoking cessation and good control of conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

## How will I be assessed?

You will be seen in a clinic by an Andrologist who is a specialist in this area. A full history and examination will be undertaken to try to find the cause of your erection difficulty. Your hormones will be checked with a blood test.

## What treatments are available and what are the side effects?

- **Testosterone replacement therapy (see guide on TRT)**
- **Tablets: e.g. Viagra**
- **Cream or pellets which go down the water pipe**
- **Vacuum erection device**
- **Injections into the side of the penis**
- **Penile implant**

## Tablets

These have been around for a long time now with the most famous being Viagra (also called Sildenafil). They work by increasing blood flow into the penis. They all require you to engage in some foreplay before they work. However they differ in terms of how quickly they work, how long they stay in your system and their interactions with food and other medications. They work very well in most men but cannot be used for everyone.

Common side effects:

- Headache
- Facial flushing
- Backache
- Visual disturbance

## Creams/pellets into water pipe

These are an option if tablets fail or can't be used. They work by passing a pellet or the cream down the water pipe after the bladder is emptied. They do not require any foreplay and don't have any drug or food interactions. The 2 used in the UK are MUSE (pellet) and Vitaros (cream).

Common side effects:

- Penile pain
- Irritation within the water pipe
- Priapism (a medical emergency involving a prolonged abnormal erection which will not subside)

## Vacuum erection device (VED)

This is a non-drug/medication option. It involves a vacuum tube, a pump and a constriction ring. The ring is placed at the base of the penis with the tube placed over the penis. A vacuum is created with the pump which increases blood into the penis with the ring ensuring the blood is retained.

Common side effects:

- Penile coldness
- Penile bruising

## Penile injections

A needle is inserted into the side of the penis to increase blood flow. You will be taught how to do this by yourself by your Andrologist. The erection may appear within 10 mins although it may take longer. There are various types of injections with either a single drug or multiple drugs.

Common side effects

- Priapism
- Penile pain
- Penile bruising or bleeding

## Penile prosthesis

This is an artificial erection device which allows you to control your erection all the time without any medications. It is inserted surgically. It is implanted surgically and is associated with very high satisfaction rates. It offers a permanent solution to erection difficulties. It provides penile rigidity sufficient for penetrative sexual intercourse.

There are 3 main types:

- Semi-rigid
- 2-piece inflatable
- 3-piece inflatable

The malleable consists of 2 semi-rigid cylinders which are implanted into the penis. This is a shorter operation and is less prone to complications. However the erection is not as natural as with the inflatable. In addition, the penis always looks like there is a semi-erection present which means you may need to be sensitive when others are around with regards to you wearing close fitting clothes. This prosthesis works by bending the penis into a straight position when you want to have sex and then the penis downwards when you no-longer want an erection.

The 2-piece and 3-piece inflatable prosthesis have more components and therefore have slightly more potential complications and involve a longer operation. However, the erection is more natural and the device deflates completely so you would not have to worry about close fitting clothes. The prosthesis has 2 cylinders, a pump and a reservoir. This prosthesis works by a hydraulic system by transferring water around a closed system controlled by the pump to the cylinders when you want an erection. The pump is located in the scrotum.

### How long will the procedure take?

The operation takes around 1-3 hours depending on which prosthesis you choose.

### What happens during the procedure?

You will have a general anaesthesia. A cut will be made at the junction between the penis and scrotum. A second incision will be made in the lower abdomen if you choose the 3-piece

prosthesis. The implant will then be inserted after creating a tunnel within the penis for the cylinders. The wound(s) will be closed and a catheter (to drain urine) and a drain will be inserted. The penis will be wrapped in a compression dressing. The implant will be left inflated (inflatable prosthesis) or in an upright position (semi-rigid).

### **How long will I be in hospital?**

You be usually be in hospital overnight. The catheter, drain and dressing will usually be removed the morning after your surgery. The device will also be deflated or manipulated into a downwards position. This may be very uncomfortable for a very short period.

### **What can I expect after discharge?**

The penis and scrotum may be bruised and swollen. You can expect significant pain for up to 6 weeks for which you will need strong regular pain killers. You will not be able to use the device for at least 6 weeks to allow healing. You will be reviewed in clinic 3-4 weeks after the surgery to start teaching you how to manipulate or cycle the device if your pain is minimal. Cycling the device involves inflating and deflating the device. It also involves moving the pump into a position which is comfortable and easy for you to access.

### **What are the possible complications?**

- Pain
- Infection
- Erosion
- Mechanical failure
- Injury to structures nearby
- Soft penis head
- Bleeding

### **How long will the implant last?**

- Semi-rigid: probably life long
- Inflatable: 8-10 years