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shots is priapism (painful erections that last more than 4 hours). This requires emergency treatment. Because of this risk, the shots must be used only with a health care provider's prescription. A man will usually become erect in 3 to 5 minutes after having a shot. Erections resulting from these shots usually last as long as an hour.

If a man's level of testosterone is low, he may be prescribed hormone treatment. Testosterone is available in the form of patches or gels that are used on the skin or as monthly shots in the arm.

#### External Mechanical Devices

There are mechanical devices that trap blood in the penis to cause an erection. They come with a vacuum chamber, a pump, connecting tubing, and elastic bands. The system requires time and dedication on the part of the couple to become comfortable with it. There are a number of such devices on the market. Please ask your doctor for more information.

#### Surgery

Men who have defects of penile arteries or veins may choose surgery to correct the defects.

#### Invasive Mechanical Devices or Implants

These are mechanical devices actually placed inside the body.

Invasive devices are used only when:

- *There is nerve and blood vessel damage.*
- *There has been no improvement with mechanical devices used outside the body, hormonal replacement therapy, or medical treatment of the cause.*

The doctor will discuss the pros and cons of each type of device and help couples select the proper one for them. The implant has rods or cylinders that can be inflated or deflated at will. Most prostheses can be inserted during a one-day surgery and require no

overnight hospital stay.

#### Semi-rigid or rigid implants:

Advantages of a semi-rigid or rigid implant are:

- *It is less expensive than an inflatable implant.*
- *It is simple to insert.*
- *It can be inserted under local, spinal, or general anesthesia.*
- *It is always ready for use once it is in place.*

Disadvantages of a semi-rigid or rigid implant are:

- It is always at its full size.
- It may be hard to conceal. A semi-rigid implant can be bent so it can be hidden and then brought into position when desired.

#### Inflatable Implants:

Advantages of an inflatable implant are:

It can be easily hidden. It uses a pump tucked in the scrotum above the left testicle and a fluid reservoir behind the pubic bone. The hollow cylinders that replace the erectile tissues are connected to the reservoir and can be inflated or deflated at will. The penis returns to a resting state when the fluid is returned to the reservoir from the cylinders by reversing the flow with the pump.

Disadvantages of an inflatable implant are:

- *It is more expensive.*
- *Inserting it requires a hospital stay of 24 to 48 hours.*
- *Since it is more complex, there are more ways in which the device could stop working.*



# ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION



**DR. RAYMOND MANSOOR**

B Sc , MB BS , DM (OG, UWI), FACOG  
OBSTETRICIAN & GYNAECOLOGIST

TANNER ST. & CORN ALLEY  
P.O. Box W1361  
ST. JOHN'S  
ANTIGUA

TEL: (268) 463 2232/3  
[info@mansoormedical.org](mailto:info@mansoormedical.org)  
[www.mansoormedical.org](http://www.mansoormedical.org)

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# Erectile Dysfunction

## What is erectile dysfunction?

Erectile dysfunction is when a man can't get an erection or can't keep an erection long enough to finish having sex. Another term for this problem is impotence.

It is normal for most men to have trouble having an erection sometimes when they are tired or nervous. When erectile dysfunction becomes a pattern or a long-lasting problem, however, it can deeply affect the emotional lives of men and their sex partners.

Erectile dysfunction affects older men more than younger men. Midlife and the later years bring changes in circulation that may affect the sex organs. Couples need to be more open and understanding with each other about sexual problems such as erectile dysfunction.

Fortunately, erectile dysfunction can sometimes be cured.

## How does it occur?

An erection is caused when there is increased blood flow into the penis. Penile veins then clamp down to trap blood there, causing stiffness. Nerves in the penis provide feelings of pleasure and help maintain the erection until ejaculation.

There are many possible physical and nonphysical causes of erectile dysfunction, including:

- *disturbance of blood flow to the penis*
- *eating or drinking too much, which diverts blood to the organs involved in digestion*
- *being very tired or having jet lag*
- *fear of failure at intercourse*
- *loss of interest in sex*
- *depression, stress, or anxiety*
- *diabetes*
- *diseases or injuries of the nervous system, such as paralysis of the lower body or multiple sclerosis*
- *alcohol and drug abuse*



- *low levels of male hormone (testosterone)*
- *side effects of medicines for heart disease, high blood pressure, epilepsy, and mental or emotional disorders*
- *problems after radical surgery for prostate cancer.*

## How is it diagnosed?

If erectile dysfunction lasts longer than 2 months or is a recurring problem, you will want your doctor to do a physical exam or refer you to a doctor who specializes in erectile problems.

The exam will include urine and blood sugar tests so that the doctor can rule out diabetes. In addition, the doctor may want to measure the level of testosterone, a male hormone in your blood.

The doctor may want to test penile blood flow and pressure. He or she may also want to measure the nighttime stiffness of the penis by the snap gauge test or stamp test.

In the snap gauge test, a band is placed around the penis before you go to sleep. If there is an erection, the snap gauge will break.

For the stamp test, you take a strip of stamps (such as Easter Seals) and make a ring around the nonerect shaft of the penis. Moisten and seal the stamp overlap before going to sleep. Do not use postage stamps because the glue is too strong. If you have an erection during sleep, the stamp ring will break. This will wake you up and allow you to feel the degree of erection. Awakening the next morning with the ring intact means you did not have an erection while you were asleep. Repeat the test the next two nights. If the stamp ring is intact three times, you probably have impaired blood flow in your penis.

If the doctor has ruled out physical problems as a cause of erectile dysfunction, he or she may refer you and your partner to a psychotherapist or family counselor.

Psychological problems causing erectile dysfunction are varied, but most can be helped. Therapy often leads to improved function in other areas of life as well as in sexual function. Psychotherapists often like to work with both partners. Therapy, like other treatments, can be uncomfortable but worthwhile. If you have concerns about your referral, discuss them with your primary doctor.



## How is it treated?

If you have problems with blood flow or blood pressure to your penis, you may have several options.

## Drug Treatment

Medicines called PDE-5 inhibitors are often used to treat erectile dysfunction. These medicines include Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis. After sexual stimulation, these medicines work by helping the blood vessels in your penis to relax. This helps blood enter your penis and helps you get or keep an erection.

These pills should not be used by men who are taking nitrates. The combination of drugs could cause a dangerously low blood pressure. Erythromycin and some antifungal medicines can also interact with these pills. Men taking these medicines may need a different dose to prevent side effects. PDE-5 inhibitors can cause side effects such as flushing, headache, and indigestion.

Other drugs can be self-injected into the penis when an erection is desired. A possible problem with these