

Diabetes and erectile dysfunction

Men with diabetes are at a higher risk of erectile dysfunction, or impotence, especially if their diabetes is not well controlled. Erectile dysfunction means you cannot have an erection sufficient to perform sexual intercourse. Many men experience short-term episodes of erectile dysfunction but, for about one in 10 men, the problem may continue.

Erectile dysfunction – causes

Erectile dysfunction can be caused by physical and psychological factors including:

- Stress, anxiety and nervousness
- Problems in relationships
- Poor health
- Drinking too much alcohol
- Cigarette smoking
- Some medications
- Some operations
- Low levels of the male hormone testosterone.

Physical erectile dysfunction happens over a period of months or years and is often a gradual loss of function. If erections still occur spontaneously overnight or in the morning, this indicates that the problem may be psychological.

The link between diabetes and erectile dysfunction

The reasons why men with diabetes are more prone to problems with erectile dysfunction are not fully understood. However, we do know that men with diabetes are more likely to develop erectile problems when their diabetes is not well controlled. Over the long term, poor control may result in increased damage to the nerves and circulation that controls blood flow to the penis. If blood glucose levels are kept in the normal range, it will help reduce the chance of these problems occurring.

Diagnosis

The treatment for erectile dysfunction depends on the cause. It's important to discuss the problem with your doctor. Often the answers to a few simple questions will help to determine if the problem is physical or psychological.

Tests can determine if the blood flow to the penis is affected. Blood tests can also help to determine if hormone problems are causing the erectile dysfunction.

Treatment

There are many treatment alternatives for erectile dysfunction. Discuss your treatment options with your doctor.

Treatments depend on the cause of the erectile dysfunction.

- **Psychological causes** – it may help to treat the causes of stress. Behavioural therapy and counselling can also be successful, particularly if your partner is involved.
- **Physical causes** – there are several possible treatments, depending on the physical cause. If the problem is related to nerve damage or poor blood supply, options include medications, vacuum devices or surgery.

When to see your doctor

See your doctor if you notice any failure to achieve an erection.

Women and sexual dysfunction

Women with diabetes complain of impairment in vaginal lubrication with arousal, presumably due to pelvic autonomic neuropathy.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your diabetes specialist
- Diabetes educator
- Community health centre
- Diabetes Australia Victoria Tel. 13 RISK (13 7475)
- Life! Taking Action on Diabetes Tel. 13 RISK (13 7475) – for information about preventing your risk of type 2 diabetes or to take a risk test online

Things to remember

- Men with diabetes are at a higher risk of erectile dysfunction, or impotence, especially if their diabetes is not well controlled.
- There are many effective treatments available.
- Discuss the problem with your doctor as soon as you notice a change.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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