

Erectile Dysfunction

CAUSES

DRUGS

Anti-depressants. SSRI anti-depressive drugs deserve a special mention. A major concern with this group of drugs is that sexual dysfunction witnessed after taking these drugs, including erectile dysfunction (ED), premature ejaculation and genital numbness **can become permanent, even after the drugs are stopped.** Over 500 cases of this nature have been reported.

Drugs that increase uric acid. Uric acid reduces nitric oxide which is essential for blood vessel dilation. Viagra works by increasing nitric oxide. Drugs which reduce nitric oxide include PPIs (such as omeprazole and lansoprazole), diuretics (such as bendroflumethiazide), beta-blockers (such as bisoprolol), aspirin, L dopa and theophylline.

Other drugs that can cause ED include drugs given for prostate problems (notably finasteride but also alpha-blockers such as tamsulosin), blood pressure drugs (including ACE inhibitors), statins and opioid painkillers (such as codeine and morphine).

FOOD

Poor diet. Researchers compared men and women on a standard low-fat diet with those on a Mediterranean diet for eight years. The **men on the Mediterranean diet were much less likely to develop ED** and the women much less likely to develop sexual dysfunction.

Sugar is half fructose which is metabolised to uric acid which, as noted, can reduce nitric oxide and cause erectile difficulties. Also sugar can reduce testosterone by 25%.

Trans fats or hydrogenated fats, found in nearly all processed foods can damage arteries (see leaflet: Fats; the Good and the Bad).

Soy is also found in nearly all processed foods and has been found to reduce sex drive, reduce male hormones (testosterone) and increase female hormones (oestrogens).

CHEMICALS

Chemicals in the environment called **endocrine disrupting chemicals** (sometimes known as gender benders) can damage hormones and accumulate in the body at very low concentrations (parts per million). For instance feminising changes have been seen in one third of male fish in British rivers and there have been global changes affecting many other species across the world from polar bears to alligators. Sperm counts have also dropped precipitously in the last few decades (33% in 15 years in one study).

The major sources of these chemicals are plastics, pesticides and all chlorinated chemicals such as dioxins and PCBs. Contamination comes from foods wrapped or micro-waved in plastics, pesticides in food, canned food (which typically have plastic liners and contain bisphenol A) and unfiltered water. **Men exposed to BPA are four times more likely to get ED.** Many toiletries also contain significant amounts of these chemicals which are easily absorbed through the skin. These pollutants have little immediate effect but accumulate in the body over time.

You can reduce exposure by using organic products where possible, using a good water filter, avoiding cans and plastic wrappings, kettles with plastic interiors and not using plastics while microwaving. Remember anything you put on your skin is absorbed into the body and anything you smell (such as aerosols, air-fresheners) is taken straight into the body.

NUTRIENTS

Deficiency of both zinc and Vitamin C can be a factor in erectile problems and may be worth supplementing. Sometimes impotence can be associated with a low testosterone and a low LH. In these cases manganese may help.

MOBILE PHONES

There have been 38 cases of breast cancer noted to occur in young women who kept their phones in their bras. Even on standby mobile phones give off powerful electromagnetic radiation which is carcinogenic and interferes with DNA repair. It seems more than likely that keeping a mobile phone in a trouser pocket could interfere with sexual function.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

The first and most important step is prevention by avoiding harmful drugs, chemicals and foods.

In addition many natural substances can help. These include:

- 1) PANAX or KOREAN GINSENG. One study found that after eight weeks this significantly improved ED even in those with moderate

to severe ED. The dose was relatively high: 3 grams daily. Another study used 900 mg three times daily.

- 2) ZINC. In one study taking zinc doubled testosterone in elderly men.
- 3) PYCNOGENOL increases nitric oxide
- 4) L ARGININE also increases nitric oxide. One study found it helped in 31% but at a high dose (5grams daily). 500mg three times a day has proved ineffective). Pistachios are a good source of L arginine. (L citrilline has a similar benefit)
- 5) NADH (nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide), which occurs naturally in the body, also increase nitric oxide and helps in erectile dysfunction.

In a study in which 1.7 grams of L arginine was given for the first month and then 40mg of pycnogenol twice daily combined with L arginine from the second month onwards, 5% of men with mild to moderate ED responded after 1 month, 80% responded after 2 months and 92.5% responded after 3 months (these were all relatively young men).