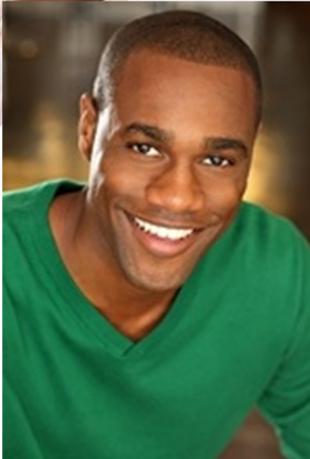


Erectile Dysfunction



What is Erectile Dysfunction?

Erectile Dysfunction (ED) is the inability to get or maintain an erection that is firm enough for sexual intercourse. It encompasses the inability to have an erection as well as being able to sustain an erection for only brief periods of time.

Its incidence increases with age but it is not an inevitable consequence of getting older. ED is treatable at any age.

How does an erection occur?

The brain sends impulses to the penis during sensory or mental sexual stimulation. These impulses cause the chambers around the penis (known as the corpora cavernosa) to relax. Blood then flows through the arteries of the penis, creating pressure in the corpora cavernosa, causing the penis to expand.

A membrane called the tunica albuginea surrounds the corpora cavernosa. It traps blood in the corpora cavernosa, sustaining the erection. The erection ends when the muscles of the penis contract, stopping the inflow of blood and opening the veins for outflow.

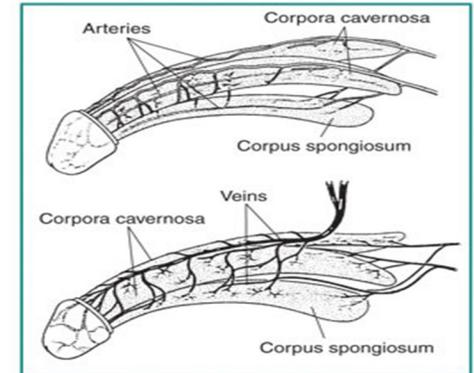


Fig 1: Changes during Erection

What causes Erectile Dysfunction?

ED usually has a physical cause. Anything that affects the blood flow, nervous supply and muscles surrounding the penis will lead to ED. Therefore, ED may be the consequence of other health problems.

Conditions that can cause ED include:

- High Blood Pressure
- Diabetes
- Nerve disease/ damage
- Multiple Sclerosis
- Atherosclerosis
- Heart disease

Some lifestyle choices can also contribute to ED

- Smoking
- Being overweight
- Excessive alcohol
- Not Exercising

Other causes of ED include:

Surgery – radical surgery to the bladder or prostate for the treatment of cancer can damage nerves or arteries surrounding the penis, leading to ED.

Drugs – A common side effect of certain drugs is ED e.g. blood pressure medicines, appetite suppressants, anti-histamines, anti-depressants etc.

Psychological factors - Stress, anxiety, guilt, low self-esteem and fear of sexual failure may cause ED or aggravate it when it has a physical cause.

How is Erectile Dysfunction treated?

After a thorough patient history, psychosocial history, physical examination and some blood tests a physician can determine the likely cause of the ED and determine the appropriate treatment.

Treatment starts from the least invasive interventions to more invasive techniques.

1. Lifestyle choices that contribute to ED should be reduced or eliminated. The patient should be encouraged to quit smoking, reduce alcohol intake and start exercising.
2. Drugs that may be contributory are reduced or replaced.
3. Treatment optimization of pre-existing medical conditions like high blood pressure and diabetes.
4. **Psychotherapy** - Counseling is aimed at reducing the anxiety associated with intercourse.

5. **Drug Therapy** – Drugs for ED can be orally ingested, inserted into the urethra at the tip of the penis or injected directly into the penis. They should only be used under direction from a doctor, as they may be dangerous when used in conjunction with other medications, particularly heart medications.
6. **Vacuum devices** - These create an erection by creating a vacuum around the penis which draws blood into the corpora carvenosa.
7. **Surgery** - This aims to
 - Implant a device that can cause the penis to become erect
 - Reconstruct arteries to increase blood flow to the penis
 - Block off veins that allow blood to leak from penile tissues

If a man has an inflatable/ malleable penile implant, he can only achieve an erection by using the implant.

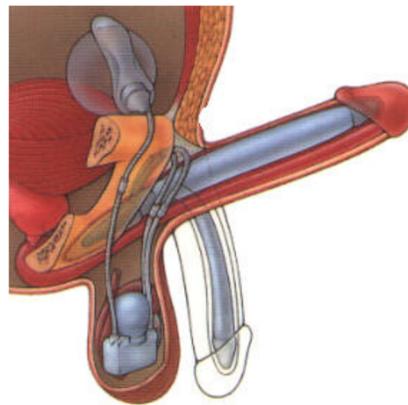
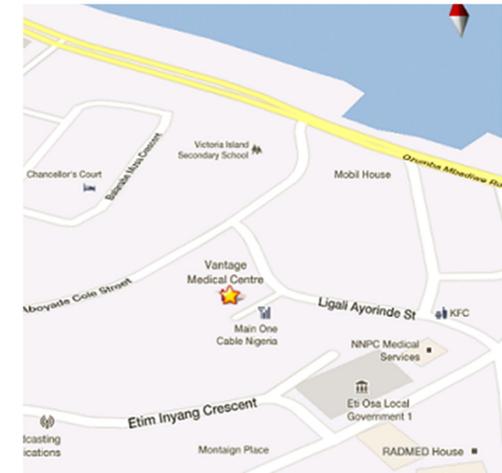


Fig 2: Using a Penile Implant

Points to remember

- ED is the inability to get or keep an erection firm enough for sexual intercourse
- It is usually associated with chronic medical conditions
- Lifestyle choices that contribute to vascular problems and heart disease increase the risk of ED
- ED is treatable at all ages
- Treatment includes lifestyle modifications, changes to medication, psychotherapy, drugs, vacuum devices and surgery.



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