

Living With and Treating Impotence

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Urology

Approximately 10-20 million men suffer from impotence, the inability to achieve or maintain an erection sufficiently rigid for intercourse, ejaculation or both. Unfortunately, less than ten percent of men with impotence seek help. While impotence is not life threatening, professional help should be sought as it can be symptomatic of other serious problems, such as atherosclerosis, diabetes and hypertension.



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contributing factor in developing impotence, mainly because it accentuates the actions of blood vessels disorders, including high blood pressure and atherosclerosis. Alcohol has also been implicated in causing impotence since when consumed in large quantities, alcohol can depress the central nervous system and impair sexual function.

What Causes Impotence?

A number of factors, both physical and psychological, can contribute to impotence. At one time, impotence was often thought to be caused by psychological factors. Now, it is estimated that between 70 and 80 percent of impotence cases are caused by physical problems.

Physical Problems

Erectile dysfunction can be caused by blood flow problems. Hardening of the arteries, high blood pressure, diabetes, or Peyronie's disease (scar tissue in the penis) can reduce blood flow to the penis. Nerve impulse problems due to diabetes, strokes, spinal cord injuries or diseases of the nervous system can also bring on erectile dysfunction. Other physical causes of impotence are surgery or trauma to the prostate, bladder or rectum and serious health problems including severe liver, heart or lung disease. A lack of hormones caused by kidney disease, liver disease, alcoholism or treatment for prostate cancer can also cause erection problems.

About one fourth of all cases of impotence can be attributed to medication. Fortunately the condition is always resolved when the medication is changed. For example, drugs taken for high blood pressure, anti-ulcer medications, drugs used in chemotherapy and most drugs that are used for psychological disorders can cause temporary erectile dysfunction. Heavy smoking is frequently a

Psychological Problems

Psychological problems are more likely to be the cause of impotence in younger men. The most frequent cause is performance anxiety. When anxiety is experienced, the brain releases chemicals known as neurotransmitters that constrict the smooth muscles of the penis and its arteries. This constriction decreases the blood flow into and increases the blood flow out of the penis and its arteries, resulting in impotence. Feelings of stress, due to job, relationship or money problems, may promote the release of brain chemicals that negatively affect performance in a similar way.

Depression is another factor that frequently leads to erectile dysfunction. Depressed people may have difficulty functioning sexually because of inhibited sexual desire and inattention to the sexual partner.

Treatments for Impotence

Your doctor will perform a thorough medical, sexual and psychological history to determine the cause of impotence. Once a diagnosis is made, a course of treatment can be decided upon. Both non-invasive and surgical treatments are available. It is important to maintain a healthy lifestyle by eating a healthy diet, exercising regularly, drinking alcohol in moderation and quitting smoking.

Non-Invasive Treatments

Through injection
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and transurethral therapy, patients are taught how to inject drugs into the erectile tissue or through the urethra in order to relax the smooth muscles of the penis so that an erection can take place.

Couples have cited an increased sense of emotional well being as a result of these therapies. They also appear to be safer and less expensive than surgical treatments.

Topical ointments have not been as successful as injected drugs, but they may be useful when the physical cause is mild or there is a psychological basis for the condition.

In 1998, the Food and Drug Administration approved a new oral drug, called Viagra, to treat erectile dysfunction. This has become the first line of treatment for most individuals and is effective in over 75% of patients who take it.

Vacuum devices or external management systems are effective, safe and simple to use for all forms of impotence, except when severe scarring has occurred from Peyronie's disease. A tube is placed over the penis and a pump is used to create a vacuum that draws blood into the penis, causing an erection. A tension ring is placed around the base of the penis to hold the erection. Studies have found that success with the vacuum device is equal to other methods, including injection therapy.

Invasive Procedures

Invasive procedures should be limited to those for whom other treatments haven't worked and who have been carefully screened. These procedures should be performed only by skilled and experienced physicians. Three types of surgical implants are currently being used for the treatment of erectile dysfunction. The implant can be hidden and is fitted to your body. However, this is now the least popular therapy for erectile dysfunction since most men are now trying the non-invasive methods first. For men whose impotence is caused by damage to the arteries or blood vessels, vascular surgery might be an option.

Revascularization (or bypass) surgery takes an artery from a leg and then surgically connects it to the arteries at the back of the penis, bypassing the blockage and restoring blood flow.

Venous ligation is performed when the penis

is unable to store a sufficient amount of blood to maintain an erection. This operation ties off or removes veins that are causing an excessive amount of blood to drain from the erection chambers.

Vascular surgery is still considered to be investigative by the American Urologic Association.

Living a Full Life

Every man will experience erectile dysfunction sometime during his life. In fact, so many physical and psychological situations can bring about erectile dysfunction, that a man should consider brief periods of impotence to be as normal as having a cold. However, if the condition persists, medical help should be sought. It is important to keep in mind that, despite problems with impotence, it is still possible to live a full and healthy life. In most healthy relationships, sex is only a part of being intimate. By talking about the problem and spending time with your partner, an intimate relationship can be re-established.

For more information call Advanced HealthLine at (262) 512-2880 or toll-free at 1-888-709-2080 outside the Milwaukee metro area, or log on at www.ah.com.

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