Erectile dysfunction: patient education guide

Patterns, contributors, assessment and safety

General health information only. This page does not diagnose a condition or replace an assessment by a qualified clinician.

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What ED can mean

Erectile dysfunction is ongoing or recurring difficulty getting or keeping an erection sufficient for the sexual activity a person wants. It is a symptom pattern, not proof of one cause. Contributors can include blood vessels, nerves, hormones, medicines, substances, pelvic health, stress and relationships.

Patterns to describe

• Situational or persistent difficulty becoming or staying erect.

• Changes in desire, orgasm, ejaculation, pain, curvature or urinary symptoms.

• Changes after illness, surgery, injury, a new medicine or an online product.

• Impact on wellbeing, confidence, sleep or relationships.

Assessment

A clinician may ask about sexual, medical, medication and psychosocial history; check general health; consider a focused examination; and discuss selective glucose, lipid, testosterone or other tests when relevant. ED can share risk factors with cardiovascular disease and diabetes, so the broader health conversation matters.

Treatment discussions

• PDE5 inhibitor medicines, local or injected therapies, vacuum devices, treatment of contributing conditions, counselling or specialist referral may be discussed.

• No medication, dose or personal treatment choice is recommended in this guide.

• Do not stop prescribed medicines without clinical advice.

Medication safety

Never combine sildenafil, tadalafil or vardenafil with nitrate medicines such as nitroglycerin, or with recreational “poppers.” The combination can cause dangerously low blood pressure. Ask a pharmacist or clinician before using any sexual-enhancement product.

Urgent help

Call 911 or go to an emergency department for chest pain, severe shortness of breath, stroke symptoms, fainting, severe allergic reaction, major genital injury, or a painful erection that persists or lasts 4 hours or more.

Bring to a visit

• Private symptom timeline and personal goals.

• Medicine, supplement, substance and allergy list, including nitrate use.

• Diabetes, blood pressure, cholesterol, sleep, pelvic, prostate or neurological history.

• A trusted partner only if you want them involved.

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