

# Preventing Erectile Dysfunction: What You Should Know

## SEXUAL HEALTH SERIES

### WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION?

Studies show that about one half of American men over age 40 have a problem getting or keeping an erection that's firm enough for sexual satisfaction. Most men have difficulties with erections from time to time. In some men it is a regular more severe problem known as erectile dysfunction or ED.

### WHAT CAUSES ED?

ED can result from physical or psychological factors, or a combination of factors, which include medicine, alcohol or other drugs. The most common risk factors for ED are diabetes, high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and cardiovascular disease. These can reduce blood flow into the penis, causing ED.

Some choices we make in life can also lead to the development of ED. Smoking, drug or alcohol abuse; particularly over a long period of time, can also compromise the blood vessels of the penis. Lack of exercise and a sedentary lifestyle will contribute to the development of ED. Some men cannot maintain an erection because blood does not remain trapped in the penis. Certain diseases, injury, surgery or radiation therapy in the pelvic area can damage nerves in the penis.

Another cause of ED is peripheral neuropathy, in which the nerves responsible for erection fail to send signals to the penis. Peripheral neuropathy can be caused by

diabetes, HIV infection, certain medications and other less common conditions.

Some emotional (depression, stress or anxiety) or relationship problems can cause or worsen ED.

Prescription and over-the-counter medications, as well as alcohol or recreational drugs, cause erectile difficulties a side effect.

### HOW CAN YOU REDUCE YOUR RISK OF DEVELOPING ED?

Taking active steps to prevent ED may help you maintain erectile function, but also help you lead a healthier life overall. Some steps you can take to prevent ED include:

- Stop smoking
- Exercise regularly
- Maintain a healthy weight
- Avoid excessive use of alcohol (more than two drinks per day)
- Avoid the use of illegal drugs
- Take medications as they are prescribed
- Talk to your doctor about the medications you are taking and if there are possible substitutions for those that may contribute to ED (never stop or change any medications without first talking to your doctor).
- If you have a chronic illness such as diabetes, heart or kidney disease, follow your doctor's recommendations to keep healthy.

## FACT SHEET

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THE OFFICIAL FOUNDATION OF  
THE AMERICAN UROLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

To download a copy of this fact sheet go to  
[www.UrologyHealth.org](http://www.UrologyHealth.org) or contact:

American Urological Association Foundation  
1000 Corporate Boulevard, Linthicum, MD 21090  
Phone: 1-800-828-7866 or 410-689-3700

If you do experience erectile dysfunction, talk to your doctor. A careful medical, social, psychological and sexual history and sometimes blood tests will help your doctor find the best treatment.

## HOW IS ED TREATED?

Your doctor may improve your ED by treating underlying causes. These may include changing certain habits, such as stopping smoking or drug abuse, which may improve or eliminate ED. Psychological problems,

depression or performance anxiety can also be treated. If ED is a side effect of a prescribed medication you are taking, your doctor may be able to adjust the dose of your medication or switch you to a different drug. Do not stop taking your medicine or change your dosage without talking to your doctor first.

The good news for many men is that ED can be prevented or treated, safely and effectively. If you have ED, there is hope. There is help. Talk to your healthcare provider about ED prevention and treatment options.

**This urologic information was provided to you by:**

For more information about ED, please visit the AUA Foundation's website, [www.UrologyHealth.org](http://www.UrologyHealth.org) or call the National Urology Health Line at 1-800-828-7866 for assistance in English and Spanish.

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This information is based on current medical and scientific knowledge and is not a tool for self-diagnosis or a substitute for professional medical advice. It is not to be used or relied on for that purpose. Please see your urologist or other healthcare provider regarding any health concerns and always consult a healthcare professional before you start or stop any treatments, including medications.

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