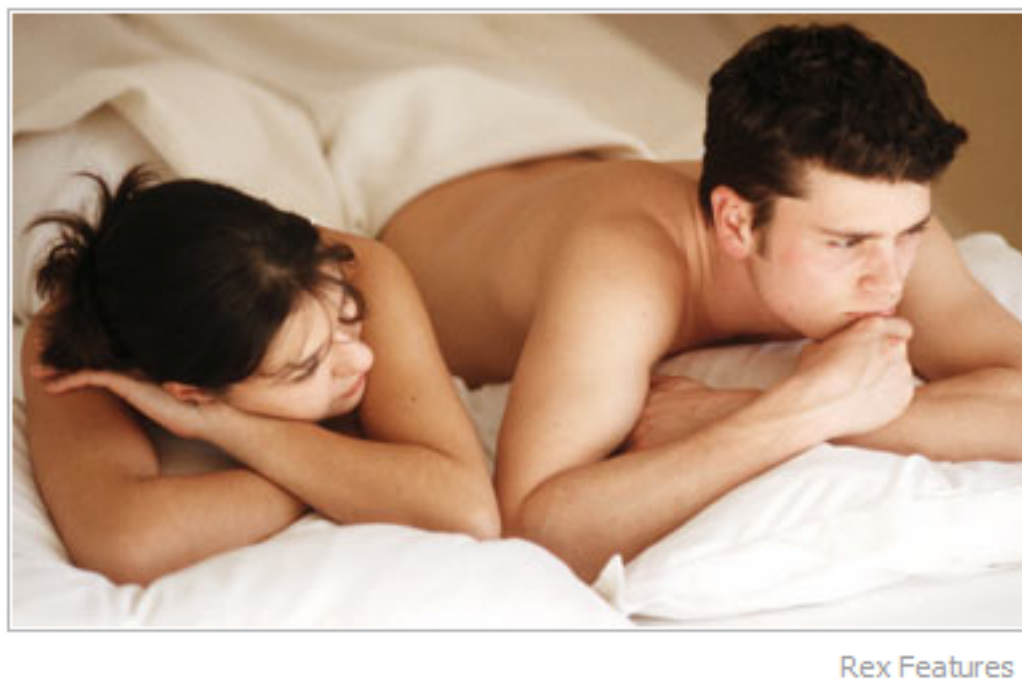




Erectile dysfunction: know the facts



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Advertising, particularly on the internet, can play on people's fears, anxieties and worries simply to get folks to buy useless products. And there's nothing that plays on a guy's sense of anxiety and self-worth than the issue of sexual performance and the fear of being impotent.

Erectile dysfunction (ED) or impotency still remains an embarrassing subject for some men and where only a small percentage of sufferers seek help.

Impotence isn't just a problem that just affects a man physically. It can also have an impact on his relationships, marriage, emotional wellbeing and other areas of his life. So there's definitely room for improvement in getting guys to discuss the subject and understand that nature needs a helping hand (pardon the pun) now and then.

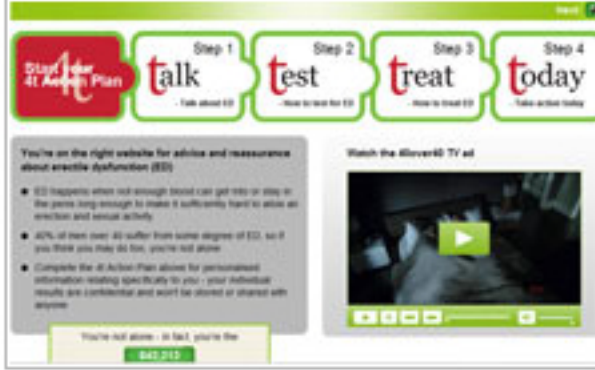
Erectile dysfunction is a major problem for many men at some stage in their lives, irrespective of age. It might not be something many guys feel comfortable talking about to their mates, or even to a professional expert but the facts are that 20 million men worldwide are taking Viagra alone to treat erectile problems and one in 10 men globally has issues - so that's not a freakish minority.

Debunking myths and stigma

According to Dr Cosmo Hallstrom of the Sloane Practice, London, more men now are approaching specialists for help and advice due to the increased awareness through the media, particularly with advertising in men's magazines and adverts on TV.

"One notable ad that has been making some impact is the 40 over 40 website" says Dr Hallstrom. "It tackles the issue in a very matter of fact way and allows men to investigate their problem - or perceived problem - through a confidential online questionnaire."

The fact is that men in their 20s and 30s can have problems. Irrespective of career backgrounds and status, men suffer from impotency or erectile dysfunction due to a wide range of issues. The 40 Over 40 site even makes an important point with its title which is that 40% of men over forty years of age suffer from some degree of erectile dysfunction.



40over40.com

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However, before panicking, guys should work out whether they have a problem at all.

"Most men experience some kind of impotency problems at some time or another" says Dr Hallstrom. "But one has to draw a distinction between an occasional failure - due to 'brewer's droop' for example - as opposed to a serious medical problem."

Discover what your problem is

Dr Hallstrom believes a guy has to do some self-analysing to get down to the real problem.

"The first thing is to decide what the nature of the problem can be before seeking help. You've got to think 'What are the emotional blocks?' Is it within you or your partner, or is it a combination of the two? If it's because you had too much to drink one night (or taken drugs) and find yourself unable to perform, well that's easier to understand. But if the problem is a consistent long-term problem that causes you and your partner difficulty then maybe you need to seek some professional advice."

Psychological reasons

One area to look at as a possible cause for impotency is attitude and psychological barriers to performing satisfactorily. It's not just a case that bad experiences might have knocked a guy's confidence in bed but something far more basic.

"You've got to want to perform, that's the bottom line" asserts Dr Hallstrom. "But psychological reasons could range from simply not fancying your partner, or that you're too anxious or depressed. Forcing it is never a good idea."

Anxiety about sex and the fear of not being able to perform are key reasons why men have problems as Dr Hallstrom explains.



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Worrying about being able to perform satisfactorily in bed is a potential psychological cause of impotency

"If you build it up too much, if you're too keen to perform or if it's too important then that can cause problems. Sexual issues that you haven't resolved will give you problems as well. If there's too much emotional investment and anxiety around the act then you may experience impaired performance."

Confidence busters

Self-consciousness about the body can also play a part - from feeling too overweight and unattractive when naked, to fearing that your appendage will be laughed at.

Greg, 38, avoided sex for months until he felt he was in better shape and less flabby. "A couple of reactions from women in the past knocked my confidence - not that my present girlfriend cares or is that shallow. But at the time it did cause anxiety and hence I had problems getting it up. I didn't have a physical problem with my penis, it was simply being too aware about my body."

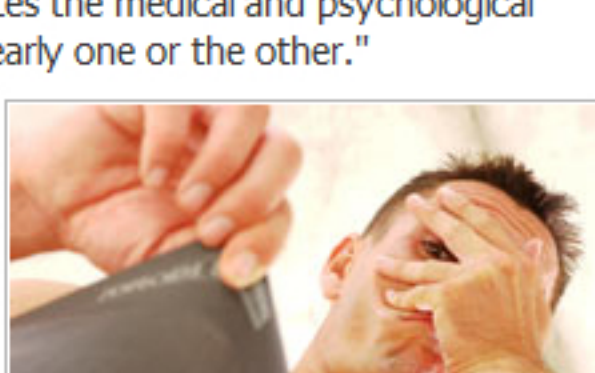
For Tim, 29, it was his self-consciousness about his hairy frame that caused anxiety when he was single and eager to pull ladies. "My furriness is pretty extreme. I get 'Yeti' jokes and it was a lottery whether a woman would be turned on or repulsed. It worried me and affected my performance. I had some counselling which really helped - and then a wax job! I have a regular girlfriend now and a good sex life. It was nonsense that I let such a trivial thing cause me anxiety and a temporary problem with impotency. Once I learned to relax everything improved."

The root of the problem

Dr Malcolm VandenBurg, specialist in general internal medicine, treats male patients at the Private Doctor Clinic. He believes erectile problems can come about for a variety of reasons rather than one source. In some cases they can be due to a combination of social/psychological issues and possibly a physical disorder as well.

"My philosophy is that there is never two sides. One has to look at the problem holistically. If someone says they have erectile dysfunction I am conscious of a number of factors that need to be looked at. My treatment integrates the medical and psychological because the problem is rarely clearly one or the other."

With many sexual therapists or psychiatrists the process requires the client to be honest and open about their sexual interests and orientation. The only way a professional can get down to the problem when dealing with a psychological issue is through complete trust and candidness between both the client and listener.



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Erectile problems can come about for a variety of reasons rather than a single source, according to Dr Malcolm VandenBurg of the Private Doctor Clinic

"Primarily I establish whether the man's erectile problems are due to physical reasons, such as diabetes, vascular disease, local diseases to the blood supply to the penis, or even previous injury. It's also important to look at whether the man is taking tablets (high blood pressure) which is making the impotence worse."

Once the physical side is looked at - and if there seem to be no major cause for concern, Dr VandenBurg looks at possible psychological issues.

"Does he have depression, anxiety, suffering from stress or is there something in his past that has affected his whole attitude to sex? It could be that he is trying to be heterosexual when he's homosexual or vice versa. My final question asks if there is something in his current relationship which is leading to difficulty with erectile function?"

Dr VandenBurg also points out that depression creates a lack of interest and desire as well as reduced drive. If you have no libido then you can't perform.

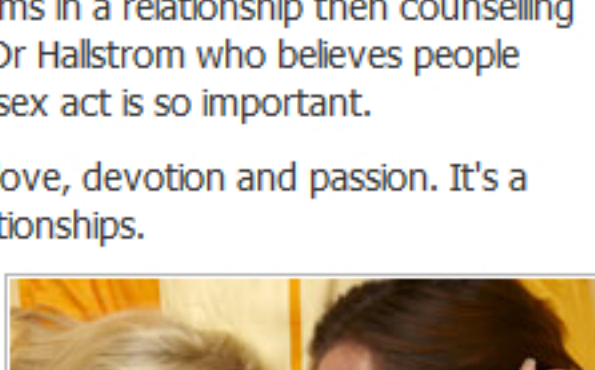
Relationships and meaning of sex

In most long-term relationships sexual passion can diminish, even go out of the window after a few years.

If impotency is a result of problems in a relationship then counselling for both partners is advised by Dr Hallstrom who believes people should ask themselves why the sex act is so important.

Often potency is confused with love, devotion and passion. It's a mistake to confuse sex with relationships.

"What is it about your relationship that makes you feel that you have to perform? It could be that your partner isn't that bothered either. But it's important to discuss these issues and decide what the best way forward is. Sexual performance is only an issue if it doesn't match the expectations of either one of the partners. If one feels the need to perform and the other doesn't, then there's a mismatch. On the other hand if you're happy enough it doesn't matter if you're doing it once a week, once a month or only a few times a year."



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Who can help?

Subject to waiting lists on the NHS it is possible to see neurological surgeons who deal with the physical aspects of impotence and clinical psychologists or sex therapists for psychological issues. There are also counsellors within GP surgeries and Relate do marital therapy.

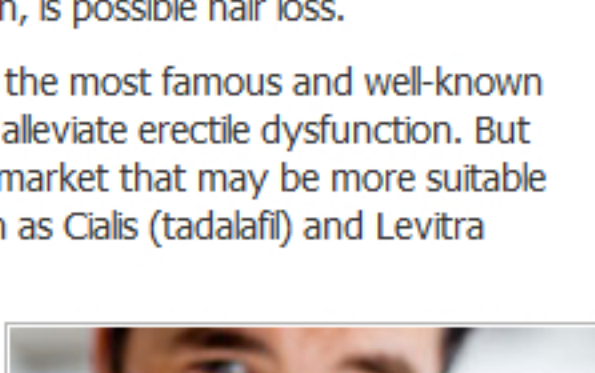
Medical treatments

There may be a variety of reasons to take up medicinal solutions for erectile dysfunction problems, be it on a temporary or permanent basis. Having prostate disease or other long-term illnesses are reasons such a route is positive and effective. Check with your GP before taking any of the following treatments, which may also be freely available on the NHS depending on certain conditions.

Testosterone injections: the theory being that as men get old testosterone levels go down, performance reduces and so injections of the male hormone will restore sexual vitality and libido. A potential side effect, apart from aggression, is possible hair loss.

Viagra (generic term Sildenafil) is the most famous and well-known brand of medicinal pill helping to alleviate erectile dysfunction. But other similar alternatives on the market that may be more suitable and involve less side effects such as Cialis (tadalafil) and Levitra (vardenafil).

Important: do not take any of the above without first consulting your GP. Some of the Sildenafil specifics may be harmful for specific conditions - such as high blood pressure or liver problems.



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Do not take any medicinal treatments for impotence, such as viagra, without first consulting your GP

It is also advisable to keep away from anything that has not been tested or approved by NHS pharmacies. Herbal remedies may sound appealing but are unlikely to have been subjected to thorough testing.

Alternative and invasive treatment

These treatments are usually taken as last resorts when all other areas have been explored and medicinal products taken orally seen as ineffective.

Vacuum pumps: Handheld device that helps cause blood to fill the penis. Allows an erection for about 30 minutes.

Hormone therapy: Alprostadil is a synthetic hormone that helps stimulate blood flow to the penis. Available as either an injection directly into the penis or a small pellet placed inside the urethra.