

# Impotence

Erectile dysfunction or impotence

What is impotence?

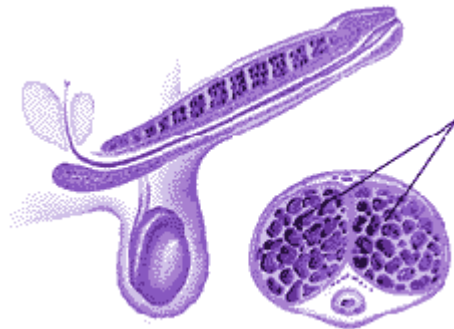
Impotence is common term for the medical condition "erectile dysfunction or ED". It is the inability of a man to achieve or maintain an erection to satisfy his, or his partner's sexual needs (i.e. to achieve penetrative sexual intercourse).

Most men by the time they are in their 40s will experience this at some time. Some men however will experience chronic, complete erectile failure and others partial or brief erections. Frequent erectile failure can cause emotional and relationship problems leading to low self-esteem. The incidence of ED increases with age, with 5% of men in their 40s affected increasing to 15-25% of men aged 65. Transient and inadequate erections affect up to 50% of men between the ages of 40 and 70.

Between 35 & 50% of men with diabetes experience erectile dysfunction.

What happens during an erection?

The process starts in the brain due to physical or psychological stimulation, and this "arousal" causes messages to be sent to the vascular system which results in an increase in the blood flow to the penis. The "corpora cavernosa" become engorged with blood and expand as a result of the increased blood flow and pressure. To maintain the erection, the fibrous elastic tissue covering the corpora cavernosa restrict the blood leaving the penis during erection. When the stimulation ends or following ejaculation the pressure in the penis decreases, the blood is released and the penis returns to its normal shape.



The erect penis: The engorged corpora cavernosa rigid with trapped blood.

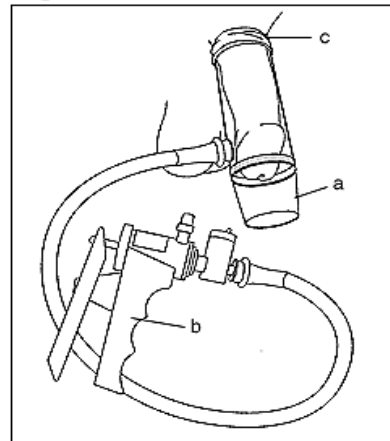
There are many physical and psychological causes, but reduced blood flow to the penis and nerve damage are the most common physical causes. Conditions associated with impotence include: vascular disease, diabetes, medicines, pelvic trauma or surgery or radiotherapy.

How can impotence be treated?

Psychological treatment will be the most appropriate single therapy where psychological factors and not physical causes are considered to be the underlying cause of the impotence.

Where a physical cause is considered to be the principle cause of the impotence then a change of prescribed medication, an oral drug such as sildenafil (Viagra), an injection into the penis or a mechanical vacuum device may all be considered.

Figure 2.



A vacuum-constrictor device causes an erection by creating a partial vacuum around the penis, which draws blood into the corpora cavernosa. Pictured here are the necessary components: (a) a plastic cylinder, which covers the penis; (b) a pump, which draws air out of the cylinder; and (c) an elastic ring, which, when fitted over the base of the penis, traps the blood and sustains the erection after the cylinder is removed.

If you wish to discuss this further please make an appointment with your GP

Some useful web-addresses

[www.healthexpress.co.uk](http://www.healthexpress.co.uk)

[www.informed.org.uk](http://www.informed.org.uk)

[www.diabetes.about.com](http://www.diabetes.about.com)