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Living with ED

The underlined terms are listed in the glossary.

Nearly every man can experience brief problems with erectile function. In almost all cases it is related to certain and specific life circumstances, problems, or stressful situations. Usually, these erectile problems disappear once the situation is resolved or changed. You generally don't need to go to the doctor.

If you experience erectile dysfunction (ED) for more than 6 months you should seek professional help. Your doctor can help you find the causes by performing physical and psychological tests. Read more about them in the section *Diagnosis of ED*.

ED can have a negative effect on quality of life. Quality of life involves both physical and psychological health. It is important not only to feel healthy but also to feel free of the psychological discomfort of living with ED. Another important issue is that different people can experience the same symptoms differently. Therefore both your personal experience and your quality of life should not be underestimated: they are as important as diagnostic tests and treatment results.

Personal relationships and sex

An intimate relationship between two people is complex and involves many aspects. ED may affect or change your relationship with yourself and your partner. You may be embarrassed and feel guilty, making it difficult to talk to your partner about this issue. ED could have a direct impact on a committed relationship.

ED can have a negative effect on your sex life. It is difficult to feel attractive and confident or be intimate with your partner when you do not feel able to give him or her pleasure. This can have an effect on trust, intimacy, and closeness. Your intimacy as well as your daily interaction may be affected.

You can become more emotionally and physically reserved because you fear you will not be able to have satisfying sexual activity. Even though this behaviour may be a sign of frustration and humiliation, your partner may think that you are losing interest in him or her. This can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and feelings of attractiveness.

These changes can be very difficult to deal with because for most men sexuality and erection remains

important throughout their whole life. You may even go into denial or suffer from depression. That is why the effect of ED on your quality of life should not be underestimated.

Many men think it is inappropriate to admit they need affection or just a hug. It is important to address the issue by discussing it with your partner. This may prevent emotional and physical distance, and can provide the comfort and emotional support you need.

Your partner may relate his or her own attractiveness and sexual attraction with the ability to get you sexually aroused. He or she can feel vulnerable, rejected, and fear infidelity or abandonment. These feelings may get worse the more often ED prevents you from having fulfilling sexual activity. While treatment to cure ED may solve the physical aspect, the psychological consequences for you and your partner may also need to be dealt with. It could help if you see a therapist.

Your partner may suffer without saying much, so it is very important that you openly discuss the best way to cope with this condition.

ED not only affects the sex life of men in a committed relationship. Single men with ED often avoid dating because of the condition.

It may be uncomfortable for you to discuss your sex life with a urologist or a sexologist, but it is the most effective way to deal with your concerns. Together with your doctor, you can identify what is important in your sex life and choose the best treatment option to have a satisfactory sex life. If you have a partner, it is important to include them in these consultations.

Seeking help

ED is a very intimate and private condition. Most patients consult multiple sources of information for erectile problems: friends, the Internet, media, a sexual health shop, a pharmacist, a psychologist, or a medical doctor.

Some men choose not to discuss it with anybody or not to go to their doctor because they:

- Think they have normal erection, so it is unnecessary to take any treatment
- Assume they can stop their sexual life, so it is unnecessary to take any treatment
- Are afraid they may have an incurable disease
- Are worried about a wrong diagnosis
- Do not have easy access to a doctor
- Have had a negative experience in the hospital
- Have friends or relatives who had a negative experience when treated for a similar condition
- Do not know about possible treatment options
- Have financial issues
- Feel isolated because of their age or condition

While these reasons may seem convincing they should not prevent you from seeking help and improving your quality of life.

Questions to ask your doctor

You may have a lot of questions regarding your condition. EAU Patient Information on ED covers many of these questions but it does not deal with your personal situation. The urologist and the sexologist are the best people to discuss this with and you should not feel embarrassed about addressing any of your concerns.

Here are some of the questions you could ask your doctor:

- Why have I developed this problem?
- Why is this happening to me?
- What will happen in the next months and years if I do not get treatment?
- What will happen in the next months and years if I choose to have treatment?
- Which are the available treatment options?
- Which treatment option do you recommend for me?
- Why do you recommend this treatment option for me?

- What can I expect from that treatment?
- What are the possible side effects or risks of this treatment?
- Will it cure my condition?
- How long will I need to be treated for?

This information was updated in May 2015.

This leaflet is part of EAU Patient Information on Erectile Dysfunction. It contains general information about this condition. If you have any specific questions about your individual medical situation you should consult your doctor or other professional healthcare provider. No leaflet can replace a personal conversation with your doctor.

This information was produced by the European Association of Urology (EAU) in collaboration with the EAU Section of Andrological Urology (ESAU) and the Young Academic Urologists (YAU).

The content of this leaflet is in line with the EAU Guidelines.

You can find this and other information on urological diseases at our website: <http://patients.uroweb.org>

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