



# Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation

## Sexual health and diabetes for men

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*Staying well until a cure is found...*

# Sexual health and diabetes

Diabetes is a leading cause of sexual health issues in men. More than half of men who have had diabetes for more than 10 years experience some form of sexual health problems. These problems become more common as we age. If our diabetes is not well managed, sexual health problems are more likely.

Problems can include reduced sex drive, ejaculatory dysfunction, and lack of sexual pleasure or satisfaction. There are also psychological challenges that can cause distress, poor quality of life and relationship difficulties.

There are safe and effective treatments. These can be offered by your doctor, healthcare professional or chemist/pharmacist. All are highly trained and experienced, so the sooner you seek help the better.

## Here's what to look out for:

### PHYSICAL:

These are problems that relate to the sexual act itself. This may include a reduced sex drive, reduced pleasure from sex, reduced ability to achieve or maintain an erection, a reduced ability to orgasm or painful sex.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL:

Men with diabetes are at an increased risk of depression, anxiety or other mood disorders. Feeling a loss of attractiveness, low self-image, low self-esteem and loneliness – these are all common in diabetes. These can all impact on men's sexual health. If these feelings persist, there are counsellors that can help. Talking with a psychosexual counsellor can be very rewarding.

### RELATIONSHIPS:

Stress and anxiety can add pressure and make the problem worse. It is important to be able to talk openly with your partner about this. Try to find a time when you won't be interrupted or have to rush away. Write them a note if you feel too uncomfortable or embarrassed to say it out loud.

### BODY IMAGE:

Having diabetes can negatively impact the way we see ourselves. Wearing medical devices such as an insulin pump or sensors, or lumps, bumps, adhesive residue or scarring around injection sites can make us feel self-conscious. Our imperfections make us perfect!

### DEMANDS OF DIABETES:

Tiredness, inconvenience of treatments or injections and burden of diabetes management can all get in the way of spontaneity with sex. Sexual health is important for physical and psychological wellbeing, so nudge it up the priority list and make time to think about it.



## Treatment options

### Oral therapies

Many men with diabetes are opting for sildenafil (Viagra), tadalafil (Cialis) and vardenafil (Levitra). These tablets are very effective in around two thirds of cases. They work by enhancing the blood flow to the penis when sexually aroused. There are no proven benefits in men with normal sexual function.

It is important that whatever treatment you take, it is tried several times (at least four) to determine whether there is any clear benefit to using the treatment. It is also important to understand how the treatment works and optimum conditions for success (as with all treatment).



### Penile injections

If oral therapy does not work or cannot be taken, many other effective treatments exist including injecting a drug such as Caverject into the penis. The drug causes the blood vessels to enlarge and the dose can be altered to allow the penis to stay erect for up to one hour. The overwhelming majority of patients notice just a little tingling on injection, rather than actual discomfort.

## MUSE

(medicated urethral system for erections)

One treatment option available is the use of a pellet called MUSE, which is inserted into the urethra, the tube that expels urine. It uses the same drug as the injection treatment and works once the pellet has been absorbed into the penis across the lining of the urethra. Although it is less effective than injection treatment, some men prefer this approach. Side effects can include some discomfort for a little while after insertion of the pellet.



## Vacuum devices

For men not keen on using drug treatment to restore erections, vacuum devices may be an acceptable alternative. This involves placing a cylinder over the penis and, with a pump device, removing air from the cylinder. This results in the penis enlarging. The cylinder is removed once a band is placed around the base of the penis to keep it erect by preventing blood from escaping. The band can be left in place for up to 30 minutes. These devices can now be prescribed under the NHS.





## Top tips

- **Seek help.** Sexual health is important to your physical and psychological wellbeing. There are treatments available to help you, so see your GP, nurse or a member of your diabetes healthcare team. Don't be embarrassed to seek help. If you feel uncomfortable, write down the questions you have, your symptoms and how you feel and hand the paper to the doctor to save having to say it out loud.
- **Optimise blood glucose** in line with targets set with your healthcare team. UK guidelines say aim for the target of 48mmol/mol or 6.5% HbA1c if you have type 1 or type 2 diabetes whilst US guidelines are 58mmol/mol or 7.5% HbA1c. Check with your healthcare team as they might suggest a different target for you.
- **Make sure your blood pressure and cholesterol are managed effectively.** Check with your healthcare team about your targets.
- **Counselling.** Seeking professional support for psychological issues can help you explore the underlying causes and find solutions that can work for you.
- **Join a support group** of others living with diabetes and see what you could try that has worked for others.

## More information

**College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists (COSRT)**

Web: [www.cosrt.org.uk](http://www.cosrt.org.uk)

**Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation (DRWF)**

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The Diabetes Research & Wellness Foundation works towards educating, informing and reminding you of the best and healthiest choices to make.

If you would like to become part of our Diabetes Wellness community, visit our website for more details.

**[www.drwf.org.uk](http://www.drwf.org.uk)**

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