



Sex and the Prostate

Seek Help!

Erection problems aren't 'all in the mind'.

One quarter of men treated for localised prostate cancer with radiotherapy can experience erection problems.

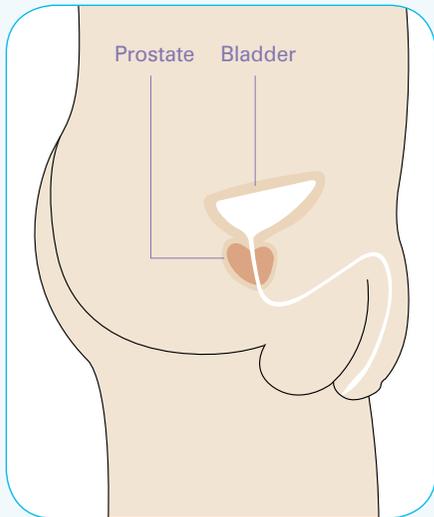
If you suffer from prostate disease and are concerned about how this could affect your relationship with your partner, seek help.

Don't worry about talking to your doctor or nurse about your sex life – they want to help and they understand that it is important to you – it's natural.

This leaflet is for men with prostate disease and their partners, who may want to find out more about sexual problems so that they can continue to enjoy or, indeed, return to an intimate and fulfilling sex life.



Sex and the prostate – two ‘intimate’ subjects



At whatever stage in life, sex is an important part of an intimate and happy relationship for most couples. A disappointing or unfulfilling sex life can often damage a relationship, leaving either partner with a feeling of loneliness, insecurity and often too embarrassed to seek help and/or to start a new relationship.

Although not typically described as a sexual problem, prostate disease and particularly its treatment, can be linked to, or be the cause of sexual problems in men. This booklet aims to explain some of the main reasons for this.

The prostate gland is part of the male genito-urinary system. It is a small organ that lies just below a man's bladder. It surrounds the urethra, the tube that carries urine from the bladder out of the body through the penis. The prostate gland produces most of the fluid in semen.

In the past, doctors and the public have been led to believe that both male sexual problems and prostate disease are just an inevitable consequence of growing older.

This misconception, coupled with a man's natural reluctance to discuss any 'private' problem leads to many couples believing that 'nothing can be done'. Nowadays, however, knowledge of male sexual function and the workings of the prostate gland, is increasing rapidly and as a result medical experts and couples themselves are able to manage these conditions more effectively.

Although not inevitable, it is true that the likelihood of male sexual dysfunction and prostate disease both increase with age.

- Approximately half of men aged 40-70 years admit to some level of erection problems and the severity of the problems can increase as a man advances within these decades.
- Nearly half of all men over the age of 65 suffer from Benign Prostatic Enlargement (BPE), sometimes also called BPH (Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia).
- Prostate cancer is rare before the age of 40, and more than 80 per cent of cases are diagnosed in men over 65 years.

Any man who notices problems with their 'waterworks' or a difference in their sex life should talk to their doctor or nurse – the two may or may not be related.

So what are the most common conditions affecting a man's sex life?

Sexual dysfunction in men can have a range of causes involving not only physical, but also psychological factors. In fact, it is difficult to separate the two since successful sexual intercourse involves both the mind and the body working together. Some of the most common male sexual problems are:

- **Erectile Dysfunction** – ('ED') – the medical terms for difficulty in achieving or keeping an erection satisfactory for a fulfilling sex life.
- **Ejaculation problems** – including premature (early) ejaculation, delayed ejaculation and retrograde ejaculation. Retrograde ejaculation is when a man senses ejaculation, but there doesn't seem to be any fluid. Semen passes into the bladder and out of the body in the urine, rather than out of the penis during orgasm. It does not affect getting an erection or achieving orgasm in any way and causes no harm in the body. However, it will reduce fertility and the chances of fathering a child.
- **Reduced sexual desire** (libido) – resulting from various psychological or physical problems depending on age, sex, sexual history and other factors.

Common Causes of Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction ('ED') has many causes, most of them physical including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, certain types of medication and surgery such as those for prostate disease. However, most men with erection problems will have a mix of both physical and psychological causes.

Erectile dysfunction may sometimes occur suddenly, particularly linked to an emotional event. When morning and night-time erections becoming increasingly uncommon, it is more likely that ED is linked to a physical cause.

So what are the most common conditions affecting a man's prostate?



From birth to young adulthood, the prostate grows from about the size of a pea to about the size of a walnut. Most men experience a second period of prostate growth in their mid-to-late 40s. There are primarily three conditions that affect the prostate.

- **Prostate Cancer** is probably the most heard-of and is indeed the most common form of cancer to affect men with about 30,000 UK men diagnosed each year.
 - **BPE (Benign Prostatic Enlargement)** or often also called BPH (Benign Prostatic Hyperplasia). This is the most common condition to affect the prostate, causing significant discomfort because of the need to frequently urinate, a reduced stream, hesitancy in starting to urinate and getting up at night to pass urine.
 - **Prostatitis** is an inflammatory disease, less common than BPE or prostate cancer, generally affecting younger men. Prostatitis can cause problems of pain and discomfort around the anus, scrotum and the area in between.
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How exactly does the prostate cause sexual problems?

The presence of prostate disease in itself can be a significant cause of sexual problems by the very nature of the distressful 'waterworks' symptoms which are associated with BPE or prostate cancer.

The prostate lies around the urethra and gradual enlargement of the prostate can push on the urethra causing urinary problems and this may affect a man's sex life. However, when sexual problems are linked to prostate disease, it may be most frequently the actual treatment for prostate disease – both medical and surgical – that cause a problem.

Before looking further at the prostatic causes of sexual problems, it is important to know and understand that sexual problems, and in particular erection disorders, can also be caused by heart diseases of all types, high blood pressure, narrowing arteries, diabetes and side-effects of medication. Lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS), most commonly caused by BPE, can be an indicator for erection problems as well as the other way round.

The following tables provide an overview only of the link between treatments for prostate disease and sexual side-effects. The doctor or nurse will be able to advise in more detail on this subject.

BPE treatments linked to sexual problems

Adapted from information provided by Prostate Research Campaign UK: www.prostate-research.org.uk

Treatment	Potential sexual side-effects
Tablets - alpha blockers (used to treat LUTS and high blood pressure)	Retrograde ejaculation but the effect is reversible
Tablets - 5-alpha reductase inhibitors (used to reduce size of prostate)	Erection problems and loss of libido and reduction in volume of ejaculate
Surgery – Transurethral Resection of the Prostate (TURP)	Retrograde ejaculation and, rarely, erection problems
Surgery - Transurethral Incision of the Prostate (TUIP)	A much lower risk of retrograde ejaculation than with a TURP
Surgery - Open Prostatectomy	Similar risk of retrograde ejaculation as TURP and the possibility of erection problems
Surgery - Laser Prostatectomy	Lower possibility of retrograde ejaculation than with a TURP