

Getting It Up? Erectile Dysfunction & Lifestyle

I have to tell you that in the past I have suffered from erectile dysfunction (ED)! It was AWFUL and resulted from the mental and emotional strain that emanated from financial problems (over three years' worth of them). In a need to 'escape reality' I also ended up half-wrecking my body with alcohol and recreational drugs, which completely upset my hormone balance. I really struggled with the 'Morning Glory' in particular.

It wasn't too disastrous as I was still able to achieve some kind of success, but it wasn't a pleasant experience and it actually caused further stress and anxiety on top of everything else. I had my hormone levels tested and the results clearly showed I was under stress. My stress hormones were too high and two of my sex hormones - progesterone and testosterone - were too low.

I also lost a lot of muscle mass, became irritable and irrational and was unable to sleep properly. I managed to eliminate many of the stresses in my life, ate and slept optimally and after two months on a supplement protocol I was absolutely fine. I now work in hormone balance for both men and women, having seen many, many clients whose hormonal imbalances are causing uncomfortable health challenges.

I have tried to write this article in a light-hearted style. I have also done my best to keep the information as simple and non-technical as possible. The light hearted style isn't supposed to undermine the serious nature of the issues under discussion, but I think you will relate to the information effectively.

Sadly, many men have erectile and other associated sexual problems, never to understand why they occur or how to overcome them. I have worked successfully with a number of men who have suffered such problems. It's a big dent to the pride for a guy to admit this type of issue but I know for a fact that there are a lot of them out there. It causes stress, loss of self-esteem and can put significant strain on relationships.

Just as men do not appreciate the hormonal changes that may cause physical, mental and emotional symptoms seen in PMS and menopause, women may likewise not understand similar biochemical changes that occur in men, especially as in middle age, men go through a process called andropause, which is the male version of menopause and causes hormonal shifts that can alter virility sexual performance.

According to Douglas McKay, ND, 50% of 40-70 year olds have trouble sustaining an erection sufficient for 'satisfactory sexual function'. I was in my early thirties when I had my problems and because of a rising incidence of



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adverse lifestyle factors, impotence is causing problems in younger and younger men.

Impotence is a serious issue and POPPING A LITTLE BLUE PILL IS NOT THE ANSWER. The very fact that sales (and free samples!) of Viagra have skyrocketed over recent years gives a clear indication that something's not right.

Causes of Erectile Dysfunction (ED)

No, it's not just because you don't fancy your girlfriend or wife anymore! The desire can be there but it doesn't always mean it's going to happen.

It was originally thought that ED was secondary to such conditions as diabetes, heart and circulatory disorders. However thousands of men suffer ED well before these conditions manifest.

The bottom line is that ED is a product of lifestyle. Poor nutrition, toxins, a lack of exercise and stress are all contributing to male sexual dysfunction. As well as ED, sperm counts are falling very alarmingly.

Stress

Stress is undoubtedly a huge cause of ED. It is important to understand the mechanism behind this. The human body is subjected to a huge amount of stress as a result of modern life. Some important causes of stress on the body are:

- Medical, over the counter & recreational drugs
- Pain and inflammation (caused by injury, food intolerance, digestive infections, etc.)
- Relationships
- Hating job / work – feeling life is hopeless in many cases
- Worries over finances
- Alcohol
- Caffeine
- Processed foods (especially sugar)
- Electromagnetic pollution – mobile phones, computers, etc.
- Polluted air (indoor air is MORE polluted than outdoor city air)
- Religious & spiritual stresses – e.g. fearing punishment from God
- Sleep deprivation
- Working too many hours
- Lack of relaxation
- Inappropriate exercise choices (too much cardio, folks, is a big problem)

Whatever the cause of the stress, the body reacts in the same way: with the **fight or flight response**. The fight or flight response is an in-built survival mechanism. In the fight or flight response you get increased activity in the SYMPATHETIC/STRESS nervous system at the expense of the PARASYMPATHETIC/RELAX nervous system.

This is important because a chemical called ACH (acetylcholine), which provides the sexual message, is made predominantly by the PARASYMPATHETIC nervous system. Therefore you need this part of the nervous system to be working well.

Getting an erection is a physiologically complicated process. Ideally, a guy needs to be relaxed so that the parasympathetic nervous system is active. If someone is constantly stressed, is working too hard, eating bad food, relying on stimulants and not getting enough quality sleep, the poor old PARASYMPATHETIC nervous system doesn't really get a chance to kick in because the SYMPATHETIC side is always switched on to help your body deal with the stress.

But imagine for the moment that you've managed to get it up, you're having a great time with a wonderfully sexy woman, you up the tempo, start breathing more heavily, your heart starts beating faster, you begin to sweat – all SYMPATHETIC activities – and your parasympathetic system shuts down in a moment of pleasure called ejaculation.

You see erections are PARASYMPATHETIC and ejaculation is SYMPATHETIC, which explains why some men (including some of my clients) can't get it up and yet they tell me they can ejaculate without any problem. Even if they can get it up, another problem may surface under stress.

You're rolling along, parasympathetic to your penis, having a great time. Suddenly you find yourself worrying about the strength of the pound to the dollar and –shazaam – you switch to sympathetic far faster than you (or your sexy partner) want. Premature ejaculation – arghhhh! So stress causes both impotence and premature ejaculation!

Then fear breeds fear. You are stressed, you can't always get it up and even if you can get it up, you shoot your bolt before your penis is out' your pants. This is a stressor in its own right and the vicious cycle continues. The less you can get it up, or the quicker you ejaculate (unless it's a quickie in the kitchen!), the more stressed you get!

You will usually find that a guy who isn't able to have a morning erection is too stressed. However a guy who does wake with morning glory but who can't rise to the occasion on demand may be suffering from a psychological issue, which is beyond our scope here.

Let's summarise:

ERECTIONS ARE DEPENDANT ON PARASYMPATHETIC ACTIVITY

EJACULATION IS DEPENDANT ON SYMPATHETIC ACTIVITY

**STRESS = INCREASED SYMPATHETIC vs. DECREASED
PARASYMPATHETIC ACTIVITY**

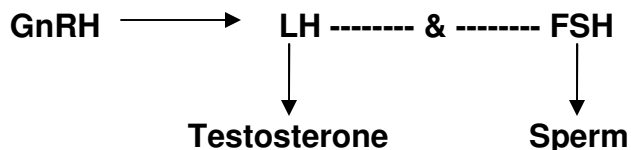
THEREFORE STRESS = (early) EJACULATION BUT NOT ERECTION!

**STRESS KNOCKS OUT ERECTIONS
& MAKES YOU EJACULATE SOONER**

In order to help get the nervous system back into balance, it is often necessary to address the lifestyle factors that are causing the most stress on the body. Getting your nutrition right, having plenty of sleep, detoxing and trying to find the oft-touted 'Work-Life Balance' are great as first steps.

Hormone Levels & Stress

In men, the brain releases the hormone GnRH (gonadotrophic releasing hormone), which stimulates the pituitary gland to release luteinising hormone – LH - and follicle-stimulating hormone - FSH. LH stimulates the testes to release testosterone. FSH stimulates sperm production.



With the onset of a stressor – injury, illness, starvation (crash diet!), stressful job, problems with feelings of self worth, divorce, bankruptcy, surgery, etc. - the whole hormone loop is inhibited. GnRH declines, leading to LH and FSH decline. The testes then close for lunch and testosterone levels and sperm counts fall.

In addition, the pituitary gland tells the adrenal glands – which sit like little hats on top of the kidneys - to produce stress hormones to enable the body to cope with the stress, whatever its cause.

The main stress hormones are ADRENALIN, CORTISOL & DHEA. For now, let's look at cortisol and DHEA.

The 'master' or 'mother' hormone out of which all these other hormones are made is PREGNENOLONE. From this hormone, the adrenal glands make many other hormones.

Pregnenolone is converted into other hormones via two main pathways. In one pathway the pregnenolone is converted into cortisol, one of the main stress hormones. In the other pathway, the pregnenolone is converted into the sex hormones testosterone, progesterone and oestrogen.

Stage 1 – Stress Overload

When it is under stress, the body produces large quantities of hormones to help deal with the stress. Cortisol and DHEA levels rise to meet the stress overload. In the wild, stress doesn't normally last too long and the adrenals have time to recuperate before the next bout of stress. But in our modern world, many men find themselves under huge amounts of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual stress, as listed above.

Stage 2 – Adrenal Fatigue

Eventually the adrenal glands will start to get tired and their ability to produce hormones will diminish. The time and amount of stress that is required to fatigue the adrenals will vary according to the nature of the stress and the individual's genetic make-up. There will be an elevated cortisol to DHEA ratio as the cortisol stays high but the adrenals sacrifice production of DHEA. Because the body is still under stress, even less sex hormones will be produced as cortisol will still be required to help the body deal with the stress.

Stage 3 – Adrenal Exhaustion

Eventually, if the stress is too prolonged, the adrenal glands become exhausted and may only be able to produce very small amounts of all hormones.

An increased CORTISOL to DHEA ratio or exhausted adrenal glands can cause many health problems, ranging from low energy to digestive problems, depression, anxiety, low immune function, insomnia, reduced muscle mass...as well as erectile dysfunction and a loss of sex drive. This is all because the body is in the Fight or Flight mode. It prioritises the production of the stress hormones over the sex hormones because survival is more important than sex! Oh, and cortisol also blocks the response of the testes to LH, i.e. they don't listen to the hormone telling them to release testosterone.

Nutrition

If your body doesn't receive the nutrients it requires, it cannot build hormones or neurotransmitters. Both are very important in helping men obtain and sustain erections.

- The neurotransmitter (brain chemical) that sends the 'sexual message' in both men and women is ACH (acetylcholine). Too little ACH causes lowered sexual function. Vitamin B5 and choline supplements may help but I'm a believer in just eating good food and perhaps taking a good multi-vitamin to meet your needs.
- Nitric Oxide is also another part of the equation as it increases blood supply to the penis. NO is made from the amino acid arginine, so a deficiency in arginine can also cause ED. You'll get arginine from protein foods such as meats and fish as well as almonds and brazil nuts.

If you eat a healthy balanced diet, it's extremely unlikely that you'll suffer from deficiencies in these substances, so taking a good multi-vitamin and eating fresh, whole food according to your [metabolic type](#) should cover the nutritional needs for getting it up!

Things can get complicated if you have a compromised or damaged digestive system. I test many people who have parasites, bacterial, yeast or fungal overgrowth and or food allergies. If the digestive system is compromised in any way, the body will not be able to utilise the nutrients in the food you eat, irrespective of the food quality. In a double-whammy, any infection or allergy will cause inflammation in the gut that many people won't feel. This inflammation will trigger more cortisol release as it's a stressor in its own right.

Insulin Resistance

Sleep and Light-Dark Cycles

In a normal hormone rhythm, cortisol peaks at around 8am, having been on the increase since around 6am. It wakes you up. Cortisol levels stay high during the morning and should then taper off as the afternoon progresses. However, if you are stressed at work, skipping meals, taking stimulants such as caffeine all afternoon, staring at a computer screen, staying up late or doing too much exercise in the evening, the cortisol levels will remain higher than they ought to be.

This suppresses growth hormone production and immune function. In a nutshell, your body is unable to repair itself properly from the day's rigours. The body does its physical repair work between the hours of 10pm and 2am. So it's when you

sleep, not just how long you sleep, that's important. The greater the incursion into this time, the less repair work your body does.

Over time, you'll upset the hormone balance and weaken the immune system. This is just another stress on the body and it can add to the straws on your Impotence Camel's back.

Alcohol, Man-Boobs and Impotence

Alcohol deserves a special mention because it can also cause a decline in testosterone levels. Drinking alcohol increases the activity of an enzyme called aromatase. This enzyme converts testosterone into oestrogen – i.e. it de-masculinises men! If men have too much oestrogen – oestrogen dominance - it's likely that they will develop breasts (man-boobs!) and put on weight around the abdomen. This is pretty common in heavy drinkers. They may also develop prostate problems, just as women who are oestrogen dominant are more likely to develop breast and endometrial cancer.

Age

It is known that as we get older, we men tend to have gradually rising oestrogen levels and falling testosterone levels. This is known as oestrogen dominance. We also produce more cortisol relative to DHEA. If the body has been under stress, the changes of this 'normal' aging are exacerbated and the tendency to develop symptoms, including erectile dysfunction, are increased and we're more likely to develop sexual dysfunction. However this does NOT mean that just because you are getting older you should suffer erectile dysfunction. A healthy man should be able to have sex until he dies!

Plastic: Fantastic or Spastic?

Rather scarily, it has emerged that our hormone systems are screwed up by compounds known as 'xeno-oestrogens'. These compounds come from plastics, meat from animals that have been given artificial hormones, pesticides and herbicides in their feed, foaming agents in cleaning products, cosmetics, DDT, PCBs and other sources.

The xeno-oestrogens are what we call 'hormone mimics', that is they have a molecular structure similar to the naturally occurring oestrogens. According to Dr John Lee, M.D., we are 'swimming in a sea of oestrogen'. The foreign oestrogens completely disrupt hormone balance and metabolic function. Moreover they overwork the liver and because they are fat soluble, they get stored in the fat cells & can contribute significantly to weight gain.

Our almost constant exposure to the chemicals is cause for concern: they are damaging the environment as well as our health. We are getting too much oestrogen and it's causing cancer as well as a host of other illnesses and diseases.

Exercise

Studies on exercise have shown that it reduces the chances of impotence. However, you want to be careful because not all exercise is beneficial.

Aerobic exercise lasting longer than 20min causes the adrenal glands to secrete cortisol. This is completely counter-productive if the body is already stressed. In this case, the exercise will simply be another stress that the body has to endure. And the Impotence Camel's back will have more chance of breaking. So even though the exercise may feel like it's a good stress release at the time, it probably isn't. Also remember that exercise in the evenings can be especially detrimental.

Males who do extreme amounts of exercise, such as professional soccer players and runners who cover more than 40 miles a week, have less LHRH, LH and testosterone, smaller testes and less functional sperm. They also have higher levels of cortisol in their bloodstream even in the absence of stress.

It is much better to have an exercise programme that helps to stimulate the release of human growth hormone (HGH), which is the antagonist to cortisol. Weight training and exercises that encourage parasympathetic nervous activity (Tai Chi, for example) are recommended. Walking outdoors in the sunlight for an hour a day is also good practice, especially in the UK where the level of sunlight is relatively low. Getting sunlight helps to keep the hormones balanced.

In human history, the only time you'd be running more than a couple of miles a day would have been if you were really intent on eating someone, or someone was intent on eating you. No other animals 'do endurance exercise'!

Therefore if you want to get it up, cut down on the aerobic exercise and lift some weights (please ensure that you are guided professionally – exercise can be very beneficial but it can also do harm).

Summary

Erectile dysfunction can be caused by a combination of the following:

- Hormone imbalances resulting from:
 - Stress (incorporating many lifestyle factors).
 - Toxicity, especially xeno-oestrogens (toxicity is really a form of stress)
 - Nutrient deficiencies (often secondary to stress)

What you can do to address the issue:

- Get a [saliva test](#) done for adrenal function and sex hormone levels.
- Take appropriate supplements based on the results of these tests (do not take testosterone or any other hormone on an ad-hoc basis as you may cause further imbalances).
- Determine your [metabolic type](#) so that you know which foods and proportions of foods are right for your body.
- At the very least eat fresh, organic, whole food wherever possible.
- Stabilise blood sugar by eating smaller meals more regularly.
- Minimise caffeine, sugar, alcohol and processed foods.
- Take a good multi-vitamin and ensure your digestive system is functioning optimally by taking digestive [enzymes](#) and [hydrochloric acid supplements](#).
- Sleep between 10pm and 6am especially in winter.
- Exercise 3-5 times per week as long as your adrenals are not in stage 3. Try weights & parasympathetic-stimulating exercise such as Tai-Chi.
- Walk outdoors for 60min each day to get plenty of sunlight.
- Don't work too hard and ensure that you take time for relaxation.
- Detoxify the body:
 - [Far Infra-red saunas](#) can mobilise and excrete toxins – including plastics – from the cells. They are excellent.
 - [Coffee enemas](#) enhance the liver's ability to detoxify the body as well as detoxifying the large intestine. If you don't want to DIY, seek professional guidance.
 - [Liver flushes](#) can help to rid the liver of built up cholesterol, bacteria and parasites that may be affecting the body's ability to detoxify.

If you would like to have your hormone levels, digestive function or detoxification capacity tested please email me directly at dave@davehompes.com or call 07890 080 126.