

## **Understanding Erectile Dysfunction**

This handout offers information on the treatment options for erectile dysfunction (ED). ED is when you have difficulty having or keeping a firm erection. This happens when there is less blood flow to your penis.

ED can be caused by more than one reason. How you feel about the changes in your erections is important no matter what the cause. Having a problem getting an erection can be stressful and upsetting. Talk to a member of your healthcare team about this.

### **Causes of erectile dysfunction**

- Age  
It is important to know that about 40% of men over age 40 and 50% over age 50 are likely to experience some ED even without a cancer diagnosis.
- Stress
- Anxiety or depression
- Lifestyle habits. This includes smoking and the use of alcohol and drugs.
- Worries about sexual performance
- Surgery and/or radiation to your pelvic area can bruise or damage the nerves around your prostate. If these nerves were cut during surgery, your erectile function may not improve.

### **What you can do to manage erectile dysfunction**

ED does not mean your sex life has to stop. It may need to be different than it was before your cancer treatment.

It is possible to have an orgasm with a soft penis. Masturbation or partner stimulation helps bring blood flow and oxygen to your penis. This can help because it keeps the tissue of your penis healthy while the nerves heal.

There are many ways you can be intimate with your partner. You and your partner may want to try oral sex, masturbation on your own or with a partner. You may also want to try sex toys like a dildo or vibrator.

### What you can do if you have a partner

- Focus on pleasure.
- Massage your partner and touch them in many different ways.
- Continue to talk, touch, kiss and hug.
- Share your feelings about sex and sexuality with your partner.
- Let your partner know what you are thinking and feeling. Let your partner know you still value them and your relationship. Listen to your partner's feelings and needs.
- Ask to talk to a cancer centre social worker if you and your partner need help starting this conversation. They offer counselling and information on exercises that may be of help (example: sensate focus exercises).

### What you can do if you do not have a partner

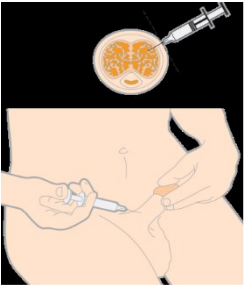
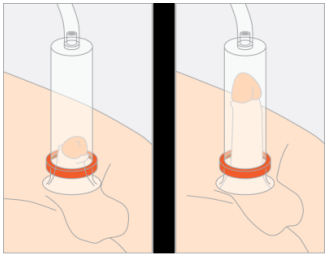
- Know that you have a right to have pleasure.
- You may worry about telling a new partner about your ED. Ask to talk to a cancer centre social worker if you need help talking to your partner.

### **Treatment options**

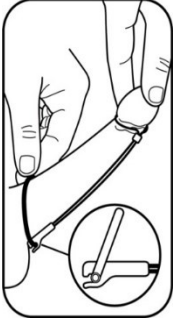

There are many treatment options available for ED. Finding a treatment option that works for you may take time. You may need to try more than 1 treatment option to find what works for you. Talk to your urologist, oncologist, family doctor or nurse practitioner to find the best option for you.

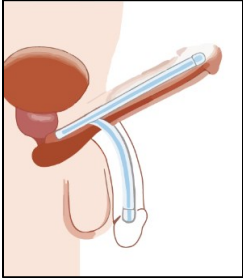
This handout offers information on 8 different treatment options:

1. Penile or intracavernosal injection
2. Vacuum Erection Device (VED)
3. Medications
4. Intraurethral pellets or Medicated Urethral System of Erection (MUSE)
5. Constriction ring
6. Elator
7. Strap-on dildo
8. Surgical penile implant

Name	What it is	How it works	How to get it	Possible side effects
<p>Penile or intracavernosal injection</p> 	<p>An injection of a medication using a small needle into the side of your penis just before intercourse.</p>	<p>The medication relaxes the blood vessels causing your penis to fill with blood and become erect. Sexual excitement is not needed for the medication to work. Erection usually happens within 5 to 20 minutes. You need to wait 10 to 30 minutes before you have sex. Erection should last about an hour and may continue after you ejaculate.</p>	<p>You need a prescription from your doctor or nurse practitioner.</p>	<p>Prolonged erection; pain and scarring in the injection area. In rare cases your erection can last longer than 4 to 6 hours. If this happens, go to the Emergency Department at the hospital closest to you.</p>
<p>Vacuum Erection Device (VED)</p> 	<p>A plastic cylinder that uses suction to draw blood into your penis to cause an erection.</p>	<p>Using a VED regularly helps maintain the length and duration of your erection. This helps keep the tissue of your penis healthy. Use the cylinder to draw blood into your penis to cause an erection. Place a rubber ring</p>	<p>You do not need a prescription to buy a VED.</p>	<p>Follow the instructions that come with the VED to avoid injury to your penis.</p>

Name	What it is	How it works	How to get it	Possible side effects
		on the base of your erect penis. The ring stops the blood from leaving your penis. You can only wear the ring for a maximum of 30 minutes at a time. There is no limit on how often you use the VED.		
Oral medications (pills or tablets)	These medications help to relax the blood vessels in your penis allowing blood to flow in and cause an erection.	Sexual desire, interest or thoughts and stimulation to your penis are needed for these medications to work well. You may need to try more than one medication to find what works best.	You need a prescription from a doctor or nurse practitioner.	Headaches and/or dizziness; redness of your face; indigestion; stuffy nose.  Do not take these medications if you are taking nitrates for your heart. Ask your doctor about this.
Constriction ring	An adjustable or elastic band placed at the base of your	The ring keeps the blood in your penis to help you keep an erection. It is usually used	Purchase these from a pharmacy or a sex	There are no side effects.

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	penis before you are sexually excited.	in combination with a VED. Remove the ring after 30 minutes.	shop online or in person at a store.	
Elator 	An external support device or splint for your penis. It allows you to have intercourse with a partial erection or without any erection at all.	Has two silicone rings. One is placed at the base of your penis and the other is placed behind the head of your penis. The rings are connected with two small, smooth, straight shafts which support your penis in an erect position.	Order online at <a href="http://www.theelator.com">www.theelator.com</a> The size must be custom fit for you.	There are no side effects.
Strap-on dildo 	An object shaped like a penis. It is either solid or hollow and used with or without a harness.	<u>With a Harness</u> Put the harness on and attach the dildo. A hollow dildo allows you to put your penis inside the dildo to penetrate a partner.  <u>Without harness</u> You hold the dildo and use it in ways you and/or your partner find enjoyable or pleasurable. It is important for you and your partner to use a lubricant.	Purchase from a sex shop online or at a store.	There are no side effects.

Name	What it is	How it works	How to get it	Possible side effects
Surgical penile  implant	A device surgically implanted in your penis. There are two types: non-inflatable implant or an inflatable implant.	<p><u>Non-Inflatable Implant</u> (Semi Rigid Rods)            Keeps your penis hard at all times. Your penis can stay bent down when an erection is not needed.</p> <p><u>Inflatable Implant</u> (Hollow Rods and Scrotum Pump):            When the pump is squeezed, it fills the rods with saline (salt water) fluid. The rods then lift causing your penis to become erect. Use the release valve to deflate your erection at any time.</p>	Talk to your surgeon.	Could stop working. There are risks to any surgery.

Talk to a member of your healthcare team if you have questions or do not understand any information in this handout.

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*The information in this handout was adapted by the Patient Education Program at the Durham Regional Cancer Centre with permission from a handout created by Trillium Health Partners.*