

# Male Sexual Dysfunction:

## Suffering in Silence



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Since the introduction, in the late 1990s, of an easy oral treatment for erectile problems in the form of the first phosphodiesterase-5 inhibitors (PDE5-Is), there has been more public awareness of men's sexual disorders.

Increasing numbers of people are going to their family doctors with sexual problems. Practitioners need to know what the common problems are, how to differentiate between them and how to treat them.

### What are the problems?

In the 1960s, Masters and Johnson publicized their four-stage sexual cycle, known as "the mountain":<sup>1</sup>

1. Libido/interest
2. Arousal/performance
3. Ejaculation/orgasm/satisfaction
4. Resolution

Men can have problems with any of these stages. The goal of the therapist is to unmask and treat the etiology, not just to confirm existing problems.

### Who has a problem?

Sexual problems are very common. Erectile difficulties have been noted in 1% to 9% of men younger than 40 and in 9% to 30% of men aged 40 to 60. The Massachusetts Male Aging Survey noted complete erectile difficulties in 9% of respondents.<sup>2</sup> Forty per cent of men over 40 acknowledged some episode of erectile dysfunction (ED), as well as 60% of those aged 70 or older.

### What is ED?

ED is the most common presenting sexual problem for men.

It is important to differentiate the cause of the disorder. There are both organic and psychologic influences to consider. Most ED is a mix of organic, psychologic and partner factors.

Ask your patient when he has erections: With fantasy? With partner? With masturbation? While sleeping? Is the ED primary—has he had an erection of recent onset?

### Eric's ED

- Eric, 35, has been married eight years and has a seven-month-old daughter.
- He has noticed a gradual decrease in libido and experiences no pleasure or interest in sexuality.
- With focus, he is able to achieve an erection and ejaculate.
- This behaviour has been present throughout his marriage and has worsened following the discovery and successful treatment of testicular cancer three years ago.



#### Eric's history reveals...

- He had a highly repressed and hyper-religious childhood. Eric felt he should not be sexual before marriage and first had sex with his wife at 28 years old.
- He acknowledges that he was never very sexual in his marriage and tends not to think about sex.

#### Eric's lab work reveals...

- Pituitary function is normal.
- Borderline low bioavailable testosterone.

#### Drawing conclusions...

- Eric demonstrates how complex presentations of problems may be. There are developmental, interpersonal and, likely, hormonal aspects to his problems.
- Primary treatment will include referral to a psychotherapist to help with assertiveness and self-esteem and encouragement to be more aware of sexual and nonsexual interaction with his wife.
- Initial treatment with testosterone is contraindicated. Further investigation of the causes of low testosterone will be pursued.