



## **WHEN YOU CAN ACHIEVE ERECTION ALONE BUT NOT WITH A PARTNER**

As we explain in our other fact sheets, erectile dysfunction (ED) is a common problem for many men, and is often down to physical or medical causes.

The fact sheet you reading now covers the particular situation where erectile dysfunction happens only or mostly when with you are with a partner.

If this pattern sounds familiar to you - if you can typically get an erection spontaneously or when you are masturbating alone, but can't get hard when with someone else - this fact sheet will help.

### **What might be causing my problem?**

All types of ED, including ones that only happen with a partner, may be down to physical causes. In particular, ED can be an early sign of heart disease or be associated with diabetes, so it's vital, to have a thorough medical checkup.

If, however, you get the all clear physically, then the root cause of your issue is likely to be psychological. In short, your body is likely to be physically capable of getting aroused

- but when with a partner, your erection is blocked by your mind and emotions, your feelings about yourself, your partner or your partnership. In particular, the problem may be down to:

- messages that you've learned in childhood about partner sex being shameful or wrong.
- an unhappy or traumatic sexual experience that means you are anxious when being sexual with a partner
- having sex with a partner you are not attracted to
- having sex with a gender you are not attracted to, for example having sex with a woman when your real attraction is to men
- a fear of being erect or climaxing in the presence of someone else or worry that you may be hurting your partner when penetrating them, particularly if your partner has had sexual health issues that might make penetration painful
- a fear of emotional commitment - this is particularly likely if you find the problem happens with long-term partners
- a need for more emotional commitment than you're getting - this is particularly likely if you find this problem occurs with short-term partners
- a fading of love towards your partner - this is particularly likely if you used to be able to get an erection with this partner but now can't
- using pornography so much that it's become difficult for you to get aroused when having sex with a 'real-life' partner
- worry that because you haven't been able to get an erection with a partner in the past and so won't be able to do so now

### **What should I do?**

- If you haven't already had a medical checkup, have one. Even though it's less likely that the cause of your issue is wholly physical, there may be medical issues adding to the problem. See your GP.
- Consider medication; Viagra, Cialis or Levitra, these treatments can be useful, and your clinician can advise you on this. For more information see our fact sheet Impotence or erectile dysfunction <http://www.sda.uk.net/ed>

problems begin by asking yourself what your feelings are about sex in general, about sex with partners in general, and about sex with this particular partner in particular.

- If your problems are usually happening within short-term relationships, then aim to make friends with, and build trust with, a partner before you have sex.

- When you do have sex, tell your partner that you want to take things slowly - which will help by removing the pressure to have an instant erection.

- Take the pressure off by not aiming for an erection when with a partner, but concentrating instead on kissing and cuddling. At least for a while - say for a month - back off from trying to get hard and simply enjoy being close, giving as well as receiving pleasure.

- If you do get an erection with a partner, don't try to push things forward to orgasm. Instead, keep relaxing and just let your erection come and go. Be interested in what's happening rather than trying to make something happen.

- If you still are having problems, then even if you're not aware of any unhappy feelings about sex, it will still be worthwhile seeing a counsellor.

-If you suspect that your erection issues are linked with sexual problems that your partner is having, talk these through and perhaps agree to see a counsellor together to explore both sets of issues.

### **How can I get counselling?**

Here is a list of possible routes to counselling. You will also find it useful to read our guidelines on how to find a counsellor. <http://www.sda.uk.net/counselling>

- Your GP may be able to refer you to a counsellor in your area.

- The College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists - [www.corst.org.uk](http://www.corst.org.uk) - is an organisation that provides specialist counselling for sex problems.

- Log on to [www.bacp.org.uk](http://www.bacp.org.uk), the website of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, which contains a listing of counsellors local to your area.

- Relate is an organisation that helps with relationship problems and you can see a counsellor there either with a partner or on your own. Their site [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk) has a listing of local Relate Centres.

- Lesbian and Gay Switchboard, [www.lgs.org.uk](http://www.lgs.org.uk) offers help and support to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities, and those who think they might be so. The website gives details of a range of ways you can get help.

### **Does this problem mean that there's something wrong with my relationship?**

Even if you are finding it difficult to gain an erection when with a partner, there may be nothing wrong with your partnership. Working with a counsellor to rethink your feelings about sex will help to solve the problem, and will almost certainly also improve your relationship with your partner.

### **Susan Quilliam for the Sexual Advice Association**

#### **Further information**

The Sexual Advice Association is here to help. We cannot give individual medical advice, but we can answer your questions on all aspects of sexual difficulties and put you in touch with local specialist practitioners.

Please feel free to write or telephone our Helpline. We have a number of fact sheets freely available to download.. Please send a large SAE when writing for information.

#### **An invitation**

..... to enrol as a friend of The Sexual Advice Association. For a small annual subscription you will know that you are contributing to a charity that helps overcome the problems of male and female sexual dysfunction. If you are interested please telephone or write for an application form or complete our on-line registration form.

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