

Erectile Dysfunction: How it can Affect Fertility for Couples

For many men, erectile dysfunction (ED) isn't the most exciting topic to discuss, let alone discuss with their doctors. Feelings of embarrassment, shame, and even depression are common amongst men who are experiencing performance issues during sexual intercourse. However, health concerns like this need to be brought up to a trusted physician because it can not only affect the person who is living with the problem but their romantic partner as well.

Having erectile dysfunction goes beyond the physical aspect of not being able to maintain an erection during intercourse by taking a severe toll on couples' mental health, and making it hard for them to conceive.

What is Erectile Dysfunction?

Erectile dysfunction is when a person cannot maintain an erection long enough to have sexual intercourse. As much as 48.8% of men younger than 40 and 40% over that age will experience severe ED problems [clinical results have concluded](#).

Normally as men become aroused, blood flows to the penis and it becomes enlarged. However, for those who experience ED, this does not happen, making it hard for individuals to stay firm during sex. This impairment can occur because of an array of reasons ranging from a mental element such as stress or a physical cause like heart disease.

No matter the reason for ED, looking for a solution is critical as it can negatively impair an individual's quality of life.

How it Affects Fertility

Not being able to keep an erection during intercourse can affect fertility in two main ways– sex and mentality. Without being able to stay firm, the act of penetration and conceiving a child will be rather difficult. That's the more obvious reason, but ED also causes a lot of relationship issues that can affect fertility.

Not being able to get pregnant within the timeframe that the couple has set for themselves can increase stress, anxiety, and panic. These emotions can affect the hormones women produce when they ovulate, in turn decreasing their chances of pregnancy. The same can be said for men as [stress can affect sperm count](#).

This is why treating ED before trying to conceive is important because it will prevent future issues and increase the chances of a happy and successful union.

How it Can be Treated

There are a few ways that are known to help men who have erectile dysfunction and most revolve around choosing healthier lifestyle options. People who smoke or drink alcohol should quit those habits immediately as they can prohibit blood flow to the arteries in the penis. [In a 2016 study](#), researchers found that tobacco is associated with a decrease in sperm concentration and increased sperm DNA fragmentation.

Aside from quitting unhealthy habits, physical activity has been found to help men who experience erectile dysfunction. Pelvic floor exercises, namely Kegels, can help to strengthen a key muscle known as the Bulbocavernosus. This muscle is responsible for making sure that the penis can pump ejaculation through systematic contractions. Doing Kegels about three times a day can make a significant difference.

However, while leading a healthier life can improve ED, results are not instantaneous. For those who are trying for a baby and need a more timely solution, consider different [ED treatments](#) that will help to maintain an erection long enough to improve the chances of conceiving. Oral medications

are not always the best option for everyone, so make sure to consult with a doctor first before taking anything.

It's important to monitor how long a couple has been trying to conceive. If it's been over a year or so, they should consider seeking professional medical help for further evaluation. Erectile dysfunction may be a result of underlying health problems like sterility or diabetes, so it's best to visit the doctor to be sure there aren't any other health complications present.

What is Male Infertility?

Male infertility generally occurs when men aren't able to produce enough sperm or there are blockages that prevent the sperm from coming out. Men have a larger impact on couple infertility and may be solely responsible in 20-30% of the cases and contributing roughly 50% of the time, according to Dr. Ranjith Ramasamy, Director of Reproductive Urology at the University of Miami.

Men who have a low sperm count tend to be asymptomatic, and only find out that there is a problem when they have trouble conceiving a child with their partner. However, low testosterone can be an indicator of infertility in men and that does indeed exhibit symptoms. Some symptoms that Dr. Ramamsamy says that men may experience include:

1. Decreased libido
2. Erectile Dysfunction
3. Hot Flashes
4. Obesity
5. Bodily Hair loss

Individuals who are affected by some of these ailments and are having trouble conceiving should schedule an appointment with an available doctor and get a referral to a urologist.

How to Treat Male Infertility

When visiting a urologist, they will take an analysis of the semen provided to try and determine the cause of the problem. After evaluation, they will come up with a treatment plan to cater to the patient's medical situation.

If it's been determined that a man has low testosterone levels, treatments are available that will help to boost them naturally. However, individuals should not try to raise testosterone levels on their own. Dr. Ramasamy explains that men with low testosterone who wish to father children should not take testosterone directly as this will further decrease sperm production and act as a contraceptive. Patients should follow the instructions provided to them by their doctor for the best results.

Despite experiencing reproductive health issues, couples trying to conceive shouldn't get discouraged. Keeping up morale and reducing stress is only going to help people to achieve their goal— a baby. With new advancements in medicine constantly happening, pregnancy is on the horizon for more couples now than it's ever been before.

While male infertility is typically related to low sperm counts, the sperm *quality* also affects the odds of conception. According to Dr. Scott Roseff, a Board Certified Reproductive Endocrinologist/Infertility Expert physician at IVFMD in Boca Raton, FL, quality refers to how the sperm is swimming (called motility), and how it's shaped (called morphology). If a man has slow swimmers they may have trouble traversing the LONG journey (at the microscopic level) through the vagina, cervix, uterus, and fallopian tube (where the egg awaits). Then, once the sperm makes its way up to the egg, it has to swim forward and penetrate the egg in order to pass its DNA off inside the egg to mix with the egg's DNA. Regarding shape, sperm has a head, neck, and a tail, and if the sperm is "misshapen" it often has trouble fertilizing the egg. Funny-shaped sperm can have big heads, tiny heads, and double tails.

Roseff says frequent causes of poor sperm quality are the various lifestyle choices known to have a significant negative impact on sperm. These include smoking and/or vaping tobacco, drinking excessive amounts of

alcohol (more than 4 glasses per week), smoking/vaping/eating THC (the active ingredient in marijuana), and exposure to high amounts of heat – heat damages sperm, so if you spend time in hot tubs, saunas, or out in the sun, consider holding off on these practices until your partner is successfully pregnant.

Finally, Dr. Roseff of IVFMD encourages men to watch their weight. A poor diet and lack of exercise lead to being overweight or obese. Obese men are usually unhealthy. And an unhealthy man will often have unhealthy sperm (“you are what you eat!”). Eat a proper balance of proteins, healthy carbohydrates, and healthy fats, exercise at least three days per week, and seek nutritional counseling if you find yourself at less than optimal weight. There ARE ways to improve sperm, so seek out care with a respected fertility expert sooner rather than later if you suspect you may have problems.