



**Cardiovascular Disease**  
&  
*Erectile Dysfunction?*

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*Your Questions Answered*

## Cardiovascular Disease & Erectile Dysfunction

It is common for men to have erection problems and we know that this is more common in men who have been diagnosed with heart disease.

It is estimated that erection problems, often referred to as impotence or erectile dysfunction (ED), may occur in as many as 8 out of every 10 men who have circulation problems, 2 of 3 who have had a heart attack and more than half of men who have had coronary bypass surgery. For many of these sufferers, their ED may be successfully treated.

### What is Erectile Dysfunction?

ED is the persistent or recurrent inability to achieve a hard penis (erection) to complete sexual intercourse.

### How Common is Erectile Dysfunction?

It is estimated that in the general population approximately one in ten men, about 200,000 Irish men, may suffer from ED at any given time with 18% of men aged 50-59, 38% of men aged between 60-69 and 57% of men aged over 70 suffering from ED.



## What Causes Erectile Dysfunction in Men with Cardiovascular Disease?

The causes of erectile dysfunction may be divided broadly into physical and psychological causes; the majority of men with erectile dysfunction experience a combination of these causes. Indeed, worrying about difficulties with your erection may contribute to the development of a more persistent problem due to the 'fear of failure' or 'performance anxiety'.

There are many and varied forms of heart and circulation disease and the presence of these problems can affect a man's erection in a number of different ways.

One type of cardiovascular disease causes difficulties for the heart to deliver the necessary amount of blood to the organs of the body, including the penis. Since erections are dependent on an adequate amount of blood flow to the penis, men with this type of disease and its complications may experience erectile dysfunction.

Another common type of cardiovascular disease is atherosclerosis, usually caused by a raised cholesterol level. This is a condition which narrows or hardens arteries all over the body. As arteries in the pelvis and penis are also affected, erection difficulties may often be one of the first signs that a man knows that he has this problem.

Men with heart disease may also experience ED as a result of certain medications to treat heart disease or high blood pressure.

Many men who have been diagnosed with heart disease often worry that exercise will precipitate a heart attack or stroke. For many men the reverse is true and mild/moderate exercise may actually be good for you. You should always discuss with your own doctor the types and amounts of exercise, including sexual intercourse, which would benefit you and are safe for your condition.

## What Treatments are Available for Men with Cardiovascular Disease and Erectile Dysfunction?

For men with cardiovascular disease who are also experiencing erection difficulties, there are a number of treatment options available. Obviously these will vary depending on the cause of the problem. These include: prescription tablets, intracavernosal injections (injections into the penis), transurethral therapy (a tiny pellet is inserted into the penis using an applicator), a vacuum pump (a vacuum tube is applied to the penis stimulating an erection) and surgical penile implants.

If you suffer from heart disease, there is a strong probability that the main cause of your ED is physical, however living and coping with ED may have had a significant emotional impact on you and hence counselling/psychotherapy may be helpful.

For men with high blood pressure and/or angina, sometimes the medication used to treat these conditions may cause erection problems. In these instances, alternative medication may be available and you should discuss these options with your doctor. It is important to remember that every patient is different and your doctor will recommend a treatment that is most suited to your needs.

### Don't Suffer in Silence

For many men, the misunderstanding and myths associated with erectile dysfunction are often the very reason why they will not speak to a health professional. If you have a form of heart disease and are also experiencing erection problems, it is important to discuss the problem with your doctor.

Erection problems often add to the normal pressures of a relationship and may bring increased feelings of despondency, lack of confidence and lowered self-esteem.

Don't let embarrassment be a barrier to seeking medical advice for sexual problems – the link between cardiovascular disease and sexual health problems is well known and your doctor will be able to discuss various treatment options with you.

The Sexual Dysfunction Information Bureau is made up of a group of Irish healthcare professionals representing general practice, urology and psychotherapy who are committed to developing a better public understanding of sexual dysfunction and its causes. Confidential advice and support is available by calling:

**Sexual Dysfunction Information Bureau**

PO Box 8064, Dublin 2.

Helpline: 1850 923 098

Website: [www.sexualdysfunction.ie](http://www.sexualdysfunction.ie)

For more information about heart disease please contact the Irish Heart Foundation

4 Clyde Road, Dublin 4

Telephone: 01 668 5001

Facsimile: 01 668 5896

Website [www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)



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