



MALE SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION
Information for Patients and Families
Covenant Health
Mental Health Programs
Grey Nuns Community Hospital & Misericordia Community Hospital

The Human Sexual Response Cycle

Before describing the various disorders of sexual functioning, some information about the human sexual response cycle needs to be provided.

This involves four distinct phases:

- **The desire phase** which includes interest in sexual activity and spontaneous sexual feelings.
- **The arousal phase** occurs after there is sexual interest and involves the reaction of the body. This includes increased heart rate, increased breathing, sweating, flushing and in the male erection of the penis.
- **The orgasmic phase** is the actual orgasm and is difficult to describe. For males it is an intense sensation that is felt around the genital area, but is also experienced as a warm and tingling sensation that spreads rapidly throughout the body.
- **The period of resolution** is the time interval before a male can engage in sexual activity again.

Each of the phases of the sexual response cycle is distinct with respect to the neurotransmitters (chemical messengers) that are involved as well as the part of the nervous system that is involved. Dysfunction can occur in any of the phases of the sexual response cycle leading to specific sexual disorders.

Also, there are major differences between males and females when it comes to sexual desire and arousal. Males are easily 'turned on' by even the thought of sex, or a visual cue, and become more immediately aroused and usually wish to engage in sex very quickly. Females are more slowly aroused and are more likely to become aroused and desirous of sex through interaction with their partner. This difference is often a cause of conflict between partners.

Sexual Dysfunction Can Be Classified As Follows:

- Sexual desire disorders
- Sexual arousal disorders
- Orgasmic disorders
- Sexual pain disorders

1. Sexual Desire Disorders

Hypoactive Or Low Sexual Desire

Occurs in about 16% of males and is characterized by a very low or absent interest in sexual activity. It can be due to a number of causes such as: depression or other psychiatric illness, stress, fatigue, a neurological problem, such as complications of Diabetes or Multiple Sclerosis. It may also be due to fluctuating testosterone or that can occur with aging.

Sexual aversion disorder is when the opportunity for sexual activity or the thought of such activity creates feelings of revulsion or disgust. It is usually a learned response. It can be caused by traumatic sexual

experiences as a child or as an adult by strong puritanical views about sex that may have come from parents. This can occur in some forms of obsessive compulsive disorder.

2. Sexual Arousal Disorders

This includes problems having and/or maintaining an erection. This is normal and common once in a while. About 18% of males have severe anxiety about performing sexually and about 11% have problems getting an erection.

This disorder can be caused by:

- a psychiatric or medical condition
- severe anxiety about performing sexually as a consequence of failing to have an erection once or twice
- it can be caused by a neurological problem such as complications of diabetes, or multiple sclerosis
- it can be due to problems with blood flow to the area
- it may be due to testosterone deficiency
- it can be due to an injury
- it can be a side effect of medications

3. Male Orgasmic Disorder

- Inorgasmia is the condition in which a male is unable to achieve an orgasm or is able to do so only after a long period of time regardless of adequate sexual interest and desire. This may be due to a number of factors but is most commonly caused by medications such as antidepressants. It is important to discuss this with your psychiatrist or family doctor.
- Premature ejaculation occurs when the male has an orgasm and ejaculates too soon, often only seconds after starting sexual activity. It can be caused by: hypersensitivity of the head of the penis, anxiety or rapid ejaculation response that the individual has always had.

4. Sexual Pain Disorder

This is a condition in which the male has pain when he has an erection or during sexual activity. This can be due to:

- any local problem to do with the head of the penis such as a rash, herpes lesions, etc.
- inflammation of the urethra
- an infection of the prostate gland
- Peyronie's disease when fibrous tissue develops on one side of the penis so that when an erection occurs, the penis becomes curved. A slight curvature of this is fairly common, but when it is extreme it can cause pain.

Are There Treatments Available for the Sexual Disorders?

The answer is yes.

The best place to start is to discuss your problem with your family doctor who will provide treatment for you or refer you to a specialist. Depending on the nature of your problem and could be referred to a urologist, neurologist, psychiatrist, psychologist or social worker. It is very important to realize that help is available and to overcome any embarrassment that may exist so that treatment can take place.

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