

# How we can help you in the Male Cardiovascular Health Clinic

**This leaflet is designed to explain some of the reasons you may be experiencing sexual problems, what you can expect when you attend the clinic and what treatments may be available to you. If you have further questions, please contact the specialist cardiac nurse (details at the end of this leaflet).**

## What is erectile dysfunction?

Erectile dysfunction (ED), also known as impotence, is where a man is unable to get or maintain an erection that is adequate for sexual activity. It is very common for men to have ED for a short time at some point in their lives. However, one in 10 men has continuing problems achieving an erection.

You have made the first positive step by seeking help, and treatment is available.

## What causes ED?

There are many reasons why you may have ED. These will be discussed with you at your appointment. There are two main types of ED – physical and psychological (emotional).

For many cardiac patients, ED is caused by a narrowing of the arteries (blood vessels) supplying the penis. The same process that 'furs' up the arteries supplying the heart muscle can also fur up arteries in other parts of the body, including those that supply the penis. Many cardiac patients suffer with erection problems before they are diagnosed with a heart problem. We now know that erection problems may be an early warning sign that other arteries, such as the heart arteries, may be furring up.

ED may also be caused by the fear that sexual intercourse may cause angina or even a heart attack. For most patients, a combination of both physical and emotional factors contributes to ED.

## What will happen at my appointment?

The Male Cardiovascular Health Clinic is held in the Cardiac Outpatient Department. It has been designed to be a one-stop clinic. This means that we will check your cardiac condition as well as your ED, with the aim of starting treatment on your first visit. However, you may need to visit more than once, so we can do further investigations before we start treatment.

You will be seen by a cardiac nurse specialist who will take your medical history and then do a physical examination. You may also need further investigations, such as an exercise test (on a treadmill), an ultrasound test or blood tests. These investigations are done to make sure that it is safe for you to engage in sexual activity. For most heart patients we expect this to be true.

You will then discuss the sexual problems you are experiencing with the cardiac nurse specialist. The nurse will then be able to talk about the treatment options available to you.

Your progress will be monitored in a follow-up clinic with the cardiac nurse specialist, who will be available to offer support for you and your partner (if you have one).

All advice and clinic consultations are completely confidential. Please remember to follow the instructions in your appointment letter when you attend your first clinic appointment.

## Should couples seek treatment together?

Some men prefer to deal with their erection problems with no help or assistance from their partner, and some even seek medical advice without their partner's knowledge. If you have a partner, most doctors and nurses agree that the best approach is to seek help together.

You are welcome to attend your clinic appointment alone or with your partner, if you prefer.

## How can ED be treated?

There is no cure for ED, but there are several very effective options available to treat it. These options will be discussed with you in more detail at your appointment:

- **Oral medication (tablets)** – Sildenafil, tadalafil, and vardenafil are very safe medicines that can be taken by many patients with heart disease. They work by increasing the blood flow to the penis, causing an erection when you are stimulated. Some of these medicines will not be available to you if you are taking certain other medicines, but this will be discussed with you when you attend the clinic and other options will be considered.
- **Injections** – Alprostadil is a drug that you or your partner injects into the side of your penis. Like oral medication, it works by increasing the blood flow to the penis, giving you an erection. The injections are already prepared and are very simple to use. We will teach you how to give the injection in the clinic.
- **Intra-urethral pellets** – Pellets are an alternative method of using alprostadil. The pellet is placed into the urethra (the opening at the tip of the penis that urine passes through). As with the injections, you will be taught how to do this in the clinic.
- **Vacuum devices** – These devices use suction to draw blood into the penis under pressure, producing an erection. A tight ring is then used at the base of the penis to prevent the blood from flowing back out of the penis.
- **Penile prosthesis** – This treatment is not recommended unless other treatment options have been fully explored. It involves surgically placing a device into the penis to achieve an erection.
- **Counselling** – Sex therapy is not available at the clinic, but the cardiac nurse specialist can refer you and your partner.

The most appropriate treatment for you will also depend on the cause of your ED. Some patients need a combination of medical treatment and therapy. In some cases a number of treatments may need to be tried until a satisfactory one is found.

## Having treatment on the NHS

Although all patients can attend the clinic on the NHS, there is a limited budget for medication treatment. Doctors and health authorities are constantly under pressure to stay within certain financial limits. In order to help them to do this, the government uses a prescribing system, called Schedule 2, for certain branded ED treatments. Please note unbranded medication (for example, sildenafil) is available without this restriction.

Schedule 2 is different from the usual way your GP prescribes treatment, in that only certain groups of patients are allowed to have treatment on the NHS. This is unrelated to their age or financial status.

## Who can receive treatment on the NHS for branded medication?

There are two groups of patients who can receive treatment on the NHS.

**Group one:** Patients who have been diagnosed as suffering from ED and who also have/have had:

- diabetes
- multiple sclerosis
- prostate cancer
- kidney failure treated with a transplant or dialysis
- major pelvic surgery
- single gene neurological disease (the name for rare, unusual muscular conditions)
- prostate removal
- poliomyelitis
- spina bifida
- Parkinson's disease, or
- severe pelvic injury.

If you usually pay for prescriptions, you will still have to pay for these if your treatment involves medicines. We will write to your GP asking them to give you a prescription. You will probably be limited to one or two tablets per week, as recommended by the Schedule 2 guidelines.

**Group two:** Patients who were diagnosed as suffering from ED and received NHS treatment for it before 14 September 1998 will continue to be able to receive treatments for ED on the NHS.

## Receiving non-NHS treatment

If you are not able to receive treatment on the NHS and decide to use medication to treat your ED, you will be given a private prescription by your GP. You will not be charged for receiving this, but you will need to pay for your medication.

You can take your private prescription to your chemist, as you would normally do with an NHS prescription. However, please note that although the actual cost of the treatment will be the same whichever chemist you use, you will generally be charged an additional dispensing fee. This fee will vary from place to place, so you may wish to shop around to find the lowest overall price.

We can also provide information about postal pharmacy services that are discreet and efficient.

## Useful sources of information

### Sexual Advice Association (for advice and support)

**t:** 020 7486 7262 (open Monday, Wednesday and Friday, 9am to 5pm)

**w:** [www.sda.uk.net](http://www.sda.uk.net)

### Contact us

If you and your partner have questions about what will happen during your appointment, please do not hesitate to phone the cardiac nurse specialist, **t:** 07900 224890

For general enquiries about your appointment, please phone the appointment centre, **t:** 020 7188 2000.

For more information leaflets on conditions, procedures, treatments and services offered at our hospitals, please visit [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/leaflets)

### Pharmacy Medicines Helpline

If you have any questions or concerns about your medicines, please speak to the staff caring for you or call our helpline.

**t:** 020 7188 8748 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday

### Your comments and concerns

For advice, support or to raise a concern, contact our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS). To make a complaint, contact the complaints department.

**t:** 020 7188 8801 (PALS)      **e:** [pals@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:pals@gstt.nhs.uk)

**t:** 020 7188 3514 (complaints)      **e:** [complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:complaints2@gstt.nhs.uk)

### Language and accessible support services

If you need an interpreter or information about your care in a different language or format, please get in touch.

**t:** 020 7188 8815      **e:** [languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:languagesupport@gstt.nhs.uk)

### NHS 111

Offers medical help and advice from fully trained advisers supported by experienced nurses and paramedics. Available over the phone 24 hours a day.

**t:** 111

### NHS Choices

Provides online information and guidance on all aspects of health and healthcare, to help you make choices about your health.

**w:** [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)

### Get involved and have your say: become a member of the Trust

Members of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust contribute to the organisation on a voluntary basis. We count on them for feedback, local knowledge and support. Membership is free and it is up to you how much you get involved. To find out more, please get in touch.

**t:** 0800 731 0319      **e:** [members@gstt.nhs.uk](mailto:members@gstt.nhs.uk)      **w:** [www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership](http://www.guysandstthomas.nhs.uk/membership)

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