

## Common Psychological cause of ED

Your brain is your major sex organ. Unpleasant thoughts, feelings and experiences can cause ED.

Chronic mental health problems such as depression, bipolar affective disorder and anxiety disorders can affect sexual function. However, most men with psychogenic ED do not have major psychological problems, nor do they share a common personality type.

Men who have psychogenic ED (ED that has no medical cause) often say to me "So it's all in my head?" The causes of psychogenic ED may include: mental distraction such as worry or frustration about performance or partner's negative reaction; anxiety; fatigue; stress; grief or relationship conflict.

### Depression

Depression often involves loss of pleasure, lack of sexual desire, reduced motivation for sexual activity and reduced sexual arousal. Unless ED has caused depression, it is better to treat the depression before treating ED. See [Resources](#) for further information on depression.

### Anxiety disorders and sexual function

There is increased incidence of erectile dysfunction in men with Social Phobia (Social Anxiety disorder), Panic Disorder, Generalised Anxiety Disorder, Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy is effective in treating ED in men with anxiety.

### Sexual Performance Anxiety

Worry about sexual performance is a common experience for men and women. It can result in a mechanical feel to sex and reluctance to try new things. Sexual performance anxiety reduces erectile rigidity and increases likelihood of losing an erection. It also makes it difficult to reach orgasm. Some people with sexual performance anxiety fake orgasm so as not to disappoint a partner. Sexual performance anxiety can also involve a type of spectating where you are busy watching what you are doing or how your body looks, rather than experiencing it.

Many people with sexual performance anxiety do not experience the common anxiety symptoms which include fast heart rate; sweaty hands; fast breathing; tingly fingers; nausea; dizziness; or a feeling of unreality. Rather they are mentally preoccupied with getting or maintaining an erection for intercourse and avoiding feelings of embarrassment,



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frustration, or disappointment. This focus on performance, and the negative feelings when performance expectations are not met, is very distracting and reduces sexual arousal. The loss or absence of arousal due to a performance focus can cause erectile dysfunction, anorgasmia, premature ejaculation, pain during sex and reduced desire for sex.

Sexual Performance Anxiety is easily treatable. Many people respond quickly over several sessions. The sooner you deal with it, the quicker it resolves.

### **Psychological distress**

Strong emotions such as grief, conflict, anger or brewing resentment towards a partner can cause ED. Major life changes that cause stress such as moving house, divorce, retrenchment or retirement can also cause ED. Partner infidelity can precipitate ED.

Men may try to down play their upset or anguish and try to tough it out. This emotional avoidance does not resolve the psychological distress and may become a barrier to emotional intimacy. It may be difficult for men to appreciate that distressing personal feelings can cause or maintain ED. Talking to your partner about your feelings is often helpful. Seeing a sex therapist may assist this process.

### **Partner psychological distress**

Partner distress can cause or maintain ED. If a partner is experiencing pain during sex this can result in tentative love making, diminished sexual desire and arousal and consequently ED. Alternatively, ED can trigger a distressed response in the partner thus adversely impacting on intimacy and eroticism and perpetuating the problem.

Some female partners of men with ED fear that ED is a sign that their man finds them unattractive, no longer loves them, is having an affair, or is gay. When a female partner attributes a man's psychogenic ED to their personal or relationship failings this can cause conflict and exacerbate sexual performance demands and maintain ED.

### **Mental distraction**

Thinking about work, or non-sexual things during sex, can result in ED. Some men with premature ejaculation have developed the habit of thinking about non-sexual topics to prolong the time to ejaculation. Over time, this distraction from sexual arousal can lead to erectile dysfunction.

Sex with a partner you are not attracted to can also reduce arousal and may over time lead to ED.



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## **Sexual orientation**

Trying to suppress your same-sex attraction by having heterosexual relationships can result in ED.

## **Lifestyle issues: Fatigue**

Fatigue is a common cause of ED. Excessive work or exercise can fatigue your body. This is more pronounced among middle aged and older men, although can occur with younger men too, especially those with physically demanding jobs. Fatigue combined with late night sex can cause ED. Changing the time you have sex to early evening, middle of the day or early morning can improve arousal and enjoyment.

## **Mixed physical and psychological causes of ED**

ED is usually a combination of psychological and physical factors rather than purely physical or psychological.

For example a 40yr old man occasionally loses erection rigidity due to vascular and neurological effects of diabetes, however his wife thinks that his partial erections are due to the fact that she has put on weight. The next time they have sex she is insecure and hesitant. He interprets her behaviour as sexual frustration and he becomes preoccupied with his erection. The more he thinks about his erection, the more he has trouble maintaining it. The more he has trouble maintaining his erection the more his wife gets upset. Sex becomes tense and full of insecurities. Communication about sex is avoided.

In this example diabetes resulted in less rigid erections. Sexual performance anxiety and partner insecurities exacerbate and maintain erectile dysfunction.