



**Cancer
Council**
Queensland

A guide for men and their partners



Sex after treatment for prostate cancer

Cancer Council Helpline

13 11 20

www.cancerqld.org.au

**Cancer
information**

Acknowledgements

Cancer Council Queensland gratefully acknowledges permission to modify and include content from Prostate Health Improvement Project Materials (Repatriation General Hospital, Daw Park, SA) in this Patient Resource. Acknowledgement is also given to Andrology Australia and to Peter Dornan for permission to modify and adapt material and diagrams from their respective publications.

Reviewers of the 3rd Edition:

Cancer Council Queensland would like to thank Dr Michael Gillman and Robert Candlish, RN who have both reviewed and contributed to the content of this booklet. Thanks also to Claire Burns for her assistance with illustrations.

Cancer Council Queensland is a not-for-profit, non-government organisation that provides free information and support for people with cancer and their families and friends throughout Queensland. These services are made possible through the generous donations of Queenslanders and we thank them for their continued support.

If you would like to know more about the information and support services provided by Cancer Council Queensland, call our Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.

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Introduction

Prostate cancer treatments often affect a man's ability to have an erection.

This booklet describes the changes you can expect and what assistance is available to you. Not all aspects of male sexual problems are covered here - just the ones you may face after treatment for prostate cancer, and in particular, problems with erections. When a man has trouble getting or keeping an erection firm enough for intercourse, this condition is called 'erectile dysfunction'.

A man's sexual activity can be affected by many things and one of these can be simply growing older. But others may be:

- ▶ Conditions such as high cholesterol, high blood pressure and increased abdominal circumference.
- ▶ Diseases such as diabetes.

- ▶ Certain medications such as those used to treat blood pressure or depression.
- ▶ Surgery to the bowel or abdomen.
- ▶ A history of smoking and/or high alcohol intake
- ▶ Increased emotional or mental distress.
- ▶ Depression.

Some men may experience a combination of these factors so there can be a wide variation in men's sexual function.

Prostate cancer treatment may then have an additional impact on your current ability to have an erection. Relatively young, healthy men and those who were having regular sex before treatment are more likely to recover erections after treatment than men who were only occasionally sexually active or those who were already having some difficulty with erections.

Because treatment for prostate cancer can affect sexual activity, this may also impact on a man's partner and intimate relationships. It can be helpful for partners to be involved in discussions about treatment and the management of sexual difficulties whenever possible.

But let us now look more closely at what sexual activity involves.



Normal Sexual Function

There are four components to normal sexual function in men

- ▶ Sex drive or libido
- ▶ Erection
- ▶ Ejaculation
- ▶ Orgasm or climax

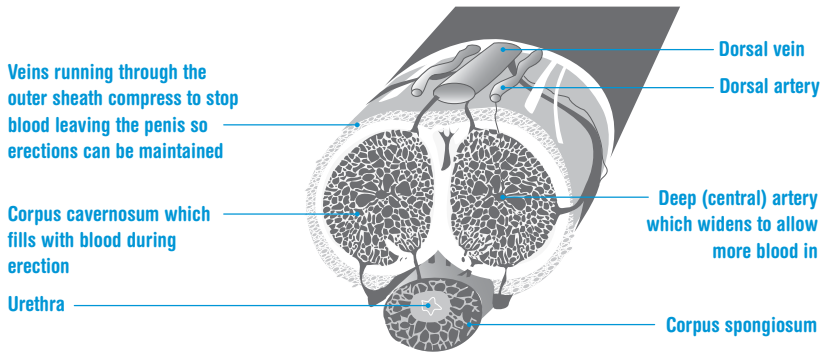
What causes sex drive?

Testosterone is the main hormone responsible for the development of male sex organs and sexual behaviour. It is produced mainly in the testes and is carried in the blood to various organs throughout the body. When testosterone levels drop, sex drive diminishes. This can occur naturally with ageing, but there are factors other than hormones that may be important. Libido can be affected by psychological factors including post-operative stress and depression even when testosterone levels are normal. Sex drive may also diminish in men who have poor erections.

What happens when you have an erection?

If we take a moment to look at the basic anatomy of the penis, getting an erection is really a simple process. There are two chambers of spongy tissue running the length of the penis (corpus cavernosum) and surrounding the urethra or urine tube (corpus spongiosum). These chambers are encased by a fibrous, partially elastic covering. With arousal and sexual stimulation, a message is sent through the nerves to the blood vessels entering the spongy tissue to let more blood in. As the blood is pumped in, the spongy chambers dilate engorging the penis. As this happens, blood flow out of the penis is blocked off. The penis elongates and stretches within its outer covering and this is known as an erection.

Figure 1. Cross section of the penis



What happens during orgasm?

If sexual stimulation continues, a man will generally experience orgasm - a sensation of extreme pleasure. Orgasm has little to do with the prostate. It is triggered in the brain as sensory nerves respond to touch and stimulation of the skin of the genital area. These nerves are different from those involved in producing erections. As long as normal sensation is intact, orgasm can occur even in the absence of an erection and ejaculation.

It may still be possible to achieve orgasm without an erection.

What happens during ejaculation?

During ejaculation, rhythmic contractions of involuntary muscle push the ejaculate or semen, which contains sperm and fluid from the prostate and seminal vesicles, through the ejaculatory ducts, (Fig 3, Page 8) out into the urethra. Semen is then pushed forwards and out through the penis. A ring of muscle called the internal sphincter surrounds the opening of the bladder. This muscular valve closes tightly during ejaculation to stop sperm passing backwards into the bladder and to stop urine and semen passing through the urethra at the same time.

What happens after ejaculation and orgasm?

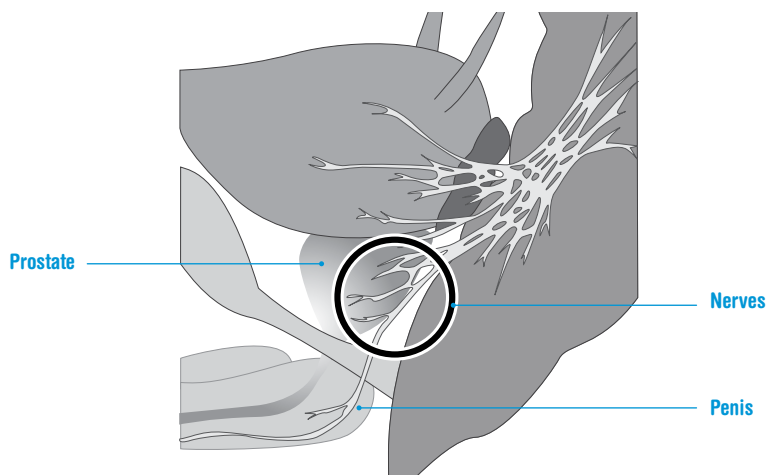
After ejaculation, the nerves stop their message, blood flow to the penis is reduced, blood flow out increases and the erection subsides. After orgasm, blood is quickly diverted back out of the penis and genital area and the body circulation returns to normal. Men experience a resting phase after orgasm that their body demands. During this time a man will have difficulty getting another erection or if aroused, reaching orgasm. This resting phase naturally lengthens with age. Young men who ejaculate quickly may have sex twice in quick succession, while an older man may need a day or so to recover enough from one orgasm to have another.

Why are erections affected by treatment?

While it doesn't directly contribute to a man's ability to have an erection, the prostate lies close to structures that are important to erectile function and these can be damaged when prostate cancer is treated. A series of fine nerves which assist in the ability to have an erection, lie in bundles against the prostatic capsule. Prostate cancer treatments such as radiation and surgery can damage both the nerves and the blood vessels that are important for strong erections.

While for some men this may be temporary, for others the damage is permanent. The internal body of the penis also lies close to the prostate gland and may be affected by radiation treatments.

Figure 2. Position of nerves

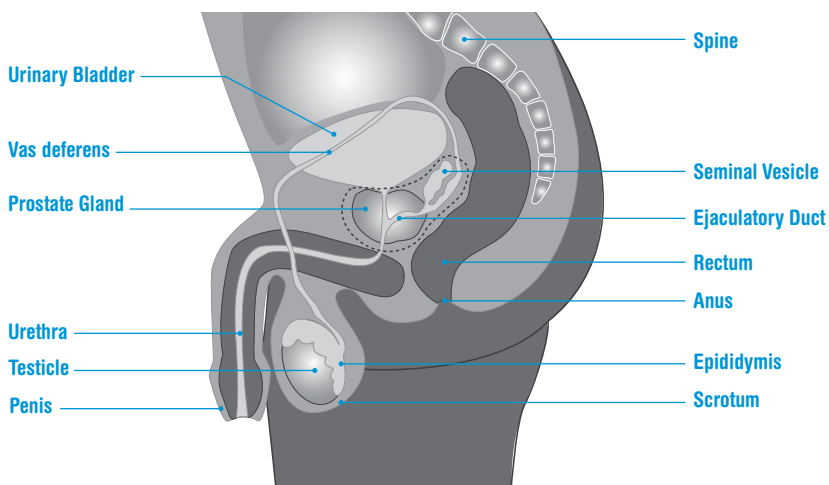


How treatments can affect sexual function

Radical prostatectomy

During this operation, the entire prostate gland, part of the urethra and the seminal vesicles are removed. (See area enclosed by dotted line in below diagram).

Figure 3. Male reproductive system



Regardless of the type of surgery they have, most men will lose the capacity to have firm erections immediately after the operation. Over time there is generally gradual improvement and the return of erections may depend on the extent to which the nerves which lie close to the prostate gland are damaged as well as a man's

pre-treatment erectile strength. The surgeon tries to minimise the risk of nerve damage during surgery by using a ‘nerve sparing’ technique. However the nerves can only be spared if there is no cancer near them. Although the nerves are important, a percentage of men who did not have nerves spared during surgery have also experienced the return of erections over time.

After a radical prostatectomy, the focus of attention is initially on the return of urinary control (continence), as the nerves and muscles controlling urine flow also lie close to the prostate and can be damaged during surgery. The majority of men will have some incontinence until the pelvic floor muscles and urinary sphincter have been strengthened and control over the bladder is regained.

“My incontinence is improving. I have very slight leakage if I sneeze or lift something heavy. I can also have very slight leakage sometimes during foreplay, and sometimes when I reach orgasm. I have learned to empty my bladder completely before beginning sex. It really bothered me at first, now my partner and I have a towel nearby in case we need it!”

Richard, 61yrs

Some men find their body looks different after surgery. The penis can appear shorter and to have shrunk into the surrounding skin folds. The way a man responds sexually to certain stimuli may also change. A glimpse of thigh or breast or the smell of perfume may no longer bring a reaction. Men often feel that they cannot enjoy sexual intimacy without an erection and this can be discouraging for them in the months following surgery. Some urologists encourage their patients to engage in penile massage as soon as it is comfortable to do so to encourage circulation and “wake up” the nerves. This will of course depend on individual circumstances and recovery time. Remember, no damage can be done through this type of experimenting.

There is evidence that shows the early use of medication, vacuum erection pumps and injection therapy as part of a penile rehabilitation program, can minimise the risk of tissue shrinkage in the penis and improve recovery of erections. It is important to discuss any questions or concerns you might have about the use of these treatments with your urologist or treating doctor.

Most importantly, the body needs time to heal after surgery and erections often return gradually. Many men experience improved erections over time, with continued improvement reported for up to four years postoperatively.

Following surgery, men will no longer ejaculate. There may be the familiar rhythmic muscular spasms and pleasure that accompany orgasm, but no semen comes out of the penis. Some men may notice a small leakage of urine during intercourse and orgasm due to damage to the sphincter muscle that controls urine flow. Men may also feel pain on orgasm but this usually settles with healing. These changes can be alarming; however they are not harmful to you or to your partner.

Brachytherapy

There are two different types of brachytherapy used in the treatment of prostate cancer, low dose rate or seed brachytherapy and high dose rate or temporary brachytherapy.

Low Dose Rate (LDR) Brachytherapy

During the procedure for LDR brachytherapy a number of small radioactive seeds are permanently embedded into the prostate gland. These seeds continue to give off low levels of radiation to the surrounding tissue for a period of six to twelve months. As there is a remote chance of seeds being passed during sexual activity, men are advised to use a condom for the first few weeks after treatment. During this time, semen may be discoloured as a result of bruising and bleeding in the prostate.

Some men report pain on ejaculation in the early months when the inflamed prostate contracts during orgasm. This generally settles as the seeds lose strength. The amount of semen ejaculated gradually decreases and some men may go on to have dry ejaculation.

High Dose Rate (HDR) Brachytherapy

High dose rate brachytherapy involves placing a number of thin, hollow plastic rods or catheters into the prostate gland. A grid is attached to the skin between the scrotum and the rectum which acts as a guide when inserting the rods and helps keep them in place during the treatment. Radioactive material is passed through the rods into the prostate. The radioactive material is left in place for a specified period of time to give the required dose of radiation and then removed. Three separate sessions of radiation treatment are given six to eight hours apart over two days. At the end of treatment the rods are removed and no radioactive material is left in the prostate gland.

High dose rate brachytherapy is most often used in combination with external beam radiation therapy for men with high-risk cancers. It allows a higher dose of radiation to be given directly into the prostate with minimal damage to other organs such as the bladder and rectum. HDR brachytherapy can sometimes be offered alone without external beam radiation. This is known as HDR monotherapy and may be suitable for men with early prostate cancer. A short course of hormone manipulation therapy is generally given before HDR brachytherapy to reduce the size of the prostate and increase the effectiveness of the radiation treatment.

Side effects of LDR and HDR brachytherapy are similar and may include irritation to the urethra, bladder and rectum for a few months following treatment. Your ability to have sex is not usually affected in the short term; however some men report increasing problems with erections in the years following brachytherapy. If you have had a short course of hormone manipulation therapy before treatment, this will generally affect your sexual desire and erections until the hormone treatment is stopped and has lost its effect.

Radiation therapy

External beam radiation treatment does not usually have an immediate effect on erections. However some men do report a noticeable decrease in the amount of ejaculate during treatment, and then a further decrease in the months after treatment is completed. A number of men notice a small leakage of urine and pain on ejaculation, particularly if the urethra has become inflamed during treatment.

The use of hormone manipulation therapy for some months before or following external beam radiation treatment can add to difficulties with sexual activity as many men find they lose interest in sex with this treatment.

Progressive damage to the nerves and small blood vessels near the prostate and the internal body of the penis, can cause increasing difficulties with erections in the years after radiation; however, it is important to remember that ageing may have an effect on the strength of erections too.

Hormone manipulation therapy

Prostate cancer needs the male hormone testosterone to grow. Reducing the levels of testosterone in the body either through removal of the testicles or by using medication, is an effective way to slow down the growth of these cancers. However, regardless of how it is done, less testosterone will mean lowered sex drive and in due course, loss of erections for most men. During treatment men will generally feel less like having sex and experience difficulty getting an erection. However this is not always so. The duration and firmness of erections will be reduced but they may still be enough for satisfying sexual intimacy. Most men notice that they ejaculate less often. For men on short term or intermittent hormone treatment, most side effects will generally disappear once treatment is stopped or

interrupted. Some men find that maintaining general physical fitness and an exercise program is helpful in combating fatigue, lifting their mood and improving sexual interest during therapy.

For the majority however, management of their cancer with hormone therapy has meant adjusting to many changes within their own bodies and in their close personal relationships. Loss of libido involves much more than an end to sexual intimacy. Some men may feel less masculine and begin to question their self worth. This can be an emotionally challenging time. Feelings of depression may be experienced. Some men have found it helpful to attend meetings of their local Prostate Cancer Support Group or to seek support through their doctor or call the **Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm for more information.**

“I don’t feel less of a man because I have prostate cancer and the treatment has affected my sex drive. My partner and I have found ways to be loving in the most intimate, private ways. She almost always initiates the foreplay that gets me interested. If she doesn’t do that I am happy to sit and be a couch potato or work at the computer and I am OK. Sadly, I forget too easily that she is NOT.”

Love, discussion and setting out to make things happen is what has helped us find our way through this. Do it and it is so wonderful. Sit back and there is a real danger of it all slipping away.”

Alan, 70yrs

Many men in this situation have found the value of a caring and supportive relationship. Time spent with their partner exploring touch and sharing other simple expressions of love and affection - simply being together - has brought their relationship to a deeper and more meaningful level.



Sex after treatment

Making time to consider how you will manage changes to your sexual function after your recovery can be helpful.

Your urologist will be able to advise you of many of the options available and support you in developing a plan for managing erection problems. If necessary he may refer you to a doctor who specialises in this field.

Sex means different things to different men. For some it is about pleasure and excitement, for others it is a way to relax and reduce tension. Men also experience sex as a way to connect deeply with their partner and to show their love. It will depend on what is important to each man, his sexual orientation, whether he has a partner and on his relationship with his partner. An erection is something that many men take for granted. Having an understanding that treatment can affect erections is often very different from the reality of life with a penis that doesn't perform. While some men find that a change in their ability to have sex does not worry them much, for others it can be a major concern. When a man sees his ability

to get an erection as an important part of being a man, impotence can leave him with deep feelings of loss. These men often fear that “if you don’t use it, you’ll lose it” and can feel enormous pressure to prove that they are still capable of performing sexually.

Single men may avoid dating for fear of rejection or being seen as an undesirable sexual partner. Deciding when to tell a new partner about your cancer experience isn’t always easy. While the timing will be different for each person; it can be helpful to wait until you and your new partner have developed a mutual level of trust and caring. There is no “perfect time” to talk about sexuality, however it is often best to talk with a new partner about your concerns before becoming sexually intimate.

Partners can find this a challenging time too. They may be uncertain of how you are feeling or how to approach you. It isn’t always easy to talk about sex, but being open and honest about your concerns and encouraging your partner to do the same, can help. Remember that holding, kissing and touching each other are still important expressions of love and closeness.

Sex as you have known it may not always be possible, however closeness and sharing are vital to any healthy relationship.

Regardless of a man’s treatment, attempting sexual activity with a limp or partially erect penis may not be easy. Men often feel that they cannot enjoy sex or orgasm if there is not a firm erection and this can be an inhibiting factor for them in the recovery period. If you have a partial erection, go ahead and attempt intercourse – this can be surprisingly satisfying for you and your partner and the stimulation may encourage further and better quality erections. Some men have found that if they attempt sexual activity standing up or kneeling, or use a constriction ring on the base of the penis, their erection can stay firmer for longer. Remember, you can achieve orgasm without

a full erection or penetration. Personal lubricants and especially the silicone based products can be helpful, particularly if prolonged stimulation is necessary.

“Sex for me after surgery will never be the same again. I miss the ejaculate and the feeling that went along with it. My orgasms are more intense, but I would rather have my prostate back. I miss natural erections; but I have also learned that intimacy and pleasure do not require penetration. Kissing, caressing, and holding can be sensuous and enjoyable.”

Rob, 57yrs

There is some evidence to suggest that the early use of medication, injections or aids such as vacuum pumps may help a couple to maintain a satisfying sex life. If you and your partner are comfortable doing so, exploring these options is preferable to waiting until an erection “just happens”. Many couples find it helpful to spend some time talking together about what is important to them in their relationship and then deciding together how they will manage changes in sexual function. It can take time to adjust to the idea of planning sex or using medications. At first you may both feel awkward and miss the spontaneous and “natural” love making you shared before treatment. Feeling relaxed and ready for sex is an important first step. It can be helpful to know how your body responds to medication and to feel confident in the use of external devices before attempting intercourse.

Loss of ejaculate can be a concern for some men. They worry that dry ejaculation will be less pleasurable for their partner. However many partners report that they do not feel the release of semen during intercourse and that dry ejaculation is actually more comfortable and “less messy” for them during both oral and penetrative sex.

Being open with each other about your worries or concerns can help you both to relax and enjoy being together.



Strengthening your relationship

Individuals and couples often expect more out of sex and intimacy these days than ever before.

Most relationships have to deal with the normal challenges of individual differences and the issues of how, where and when couples will have sex. Some of these things may need to be discussed again after treatment for prostate cancer.

For many of us, a relationship based on trust and mutual understanding is an important part of a satisfying sexual experience. Keeping a relationship happy, intimate and satisfying takes time and effort on both sides. With today's busy lifestyles people can tend to work long hours, watch TV or spend time at their computers. There may not be much time or energy for being together, talking to each other or doing things they enjoy. To develop intimacy, a couple needs to practice spending time together talking, relaxing and doing things that help them connect as a couple. Sexual intercourse may not always be possible, but closeness and sharing are vital to a healthy relationship.

Cuddling, massage, touching and kissing are special ways to be together without the need to have sex. These are just some of the possible ways you and your partner can be close. Being comfortable and open with each other will allow your relationship to grow and support you both as you face the changes that come with treatment.

Sexual intimacy involves more than intercourse – experiment with other ways of giving and receiving sexual pleasure.

Sometimes there can be other barriers to developing closeness in a relationship such as conflict, resentment, anger or withdrawal. Relationship counselling has helped many couples learn better ways to communicate and support each other, allowing them to find more satisfaction in their life together. For information about relationship counselling talk with your doctor or contact the **Cancer Council Helpline** on **13 11 20**.

What you can do

Medications

Medications commonly used to improve erections include

1. Tablets that are taken orally.
2. Medications injected directly into the tissues of the penis.

The tablets used in the treatment of erection problems are called Phosphodiesterase-5 inhibitors (PDE5 inhibitors) and they have been available in Australia for some years now. The three drugs used most often are:

- ▶ Viagra® or sildenafil
- ▶ Cialis ® or tadalafil
- ▶ Levitra ® or vardenafil

These drugs do not artificially cause erections but help the body's natural response to sexual stimulation. They need to be taken at least 90 minutes before sexual activity. Viagra® should be taken on an empty stomach, as food can affect its absorption. Viagra® generally lasts around four hours and Levitra® for around six hours, though some men find they can last for up to 12 hours. Cialis® has a longer action with many men being able to have erections within a 24 hour period or more. A new once daily low dose of Cialis® 5mg is now also available.

How effective are these drugs?

These tablets appear to be most helpful for men who have good nerve function after treatment for prostate cancer. There can be some differences in how men respond to these drugs and one may work better than another. Dosage can also be important and may need to be adjusted to have the desired effect. A one-off dose of these tablets may not be enough to help produce an erection.

Your doctor may suggest you increase the dose or repeat it over two or three consecutive days to have the desired effect.

Don't give up after one dose; repeated daily doses over two to three weeks may be necessary to see an effect from these medications.

What are the side-effects?

The most common side-effects reported from this family of drugs include facial flushing and a blocked nose. Indigestion and headaches are common but these often settle with regular use. Flu-like muscle aches and backache can also occur. Men sometimes notice a brighter bluish tint to their vision with **Viagra®**. Most side effects seem to last only an hour or two.

How safe are these drugs?

Viagra®, **Cialis®** and **Levitra®** should never be taken with drugs in the nitrate family such as **Anginine™** or sprays that are taken for chest pains or long-acting nitrate tablets or nitrate patches used to prevent chest pain. Recreational nitrates such as amyl nitrate must also not be taken while using **Viagra®**, **Cialis®** and **Levitra®**.

PDE5 inhibitors do not cause heart attacks or damage the heart itself; however the physical strain of sexual activity can be dangerous for some men with existing heart problems. Men who have experienced stroke, chest pain or shortness of breath while exercising, or have a known heart condition must discuss use of these medications with their doctor or cardiologist.

These drugs should only be used under a doctor's prescription and supervision.

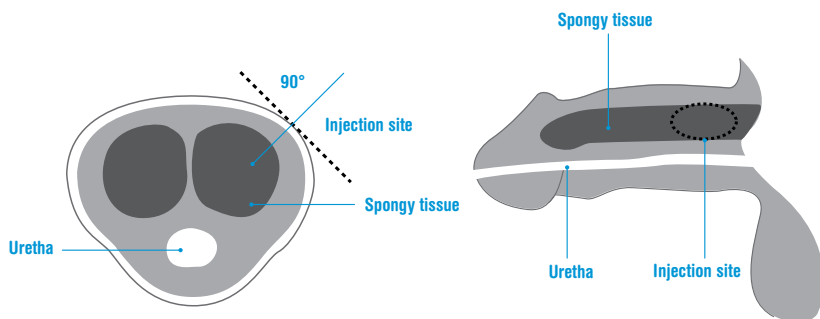
Injection therapy

Penile injections are a commonly used and effective treatment for men who have erection problems following treatment for prostate cancer. A drug or mixture of drugs is injected into the penis each time an erection is desired and this is generally achieved within five to ten minutes without the need for any direct sexual stimulation. The injection dilates the blood vessels allowing the penis to become engorged with blood and then shutting off the outflow. The erection usually lasts about 30 to 60 minutes and continues even after orgasm.

Good technique is important and men need to be taught how to inject themselves properly with supervised sessions in their doctor or specialist's rooms recommended. Finding the right individual dose can also be critical to the success of this therapy as the amount of drug required can differ from person to person. Caverject Impulse® is one commonly used penile injection. Other less expensive, individually prescribed drug combinations are now being increasingly used with good effect. Some men find the procedure quite painful, however this situation usually improves and may be helped with the use of an auto injector.

Although this treatment has not been associated with any major side effects, injection of too large a dose can cause a prolonged and painful erection (called priapism). As a precaution, some doctors prescribe anti-erection medication to be kept on hand in case an erection continues for too long. With long term use scar tissue may form around the injection site causing a curvature of the penis. The accompanying drug information should be read carefully and instructions followed.

Figure 4. Injection Therapy



These injections are not available on the PBS however some reimbursement of costs may be claimable through certain levels of private health insurance cover.

Mechanical devices

The two main devices that may be used to help men get an erection are:

- ▶ Vacuum erection devices or pumps
- ▶ Penile prostheses or implants

Each of these has been widely and satisfactorily used by men after prostate cancer treatment. There may be various options available, so be sure to explore all of the possibilities with your doctor.

Vacuum erection devices (VEDs)

An erection may be created using a vacuum pump. A rigid tube is slipped over the penis and sealed off. Then a pump-like mechanism is used to create a partial vacuum which forces blood to flow into the penis, fully engorging it. Once the erection is created, a band is placed onto the base of the penis close to the pubic bone, to

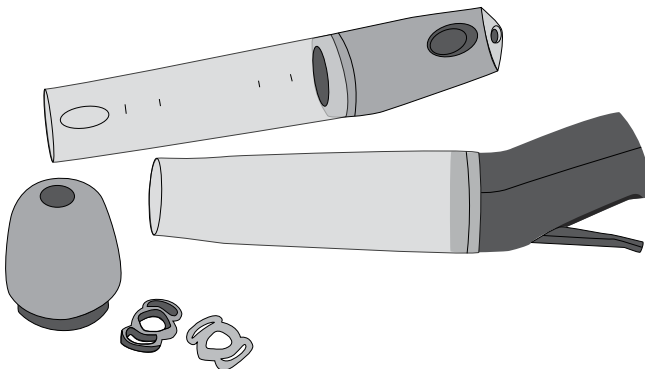
keep the erection firm during sexual activity. The band can be worn comfortably for up to 30 minutes.

It can take some time for a man to feel comfortable and confident using the vacuum pump, so education and personal practice with these devices is recommended. Most manufacturers provide DVD's demonstrating the use of their product and may also provide personal instruction. VEDs are fully reusable and a number of models are available, some of which are battery operated. These items are not available on the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme (PBS) and can cost upwards of \$500 each. Some reimbursement of cost may be claimable through certain levels of private health insurance cover.

Cheaper models of these devices may also be available through your local adult store.

When a man is able to get an erection naturally but has difficulty keeping it, he may benefit from using the VED to strengthen his erection or he may find that using a rubber ring around the base of the erect penis will sometimes help to keep it rigid enough for intercourse. The rings are available separately or can be purchased with a simple applicator.

Figure 5. Vacuum erection device

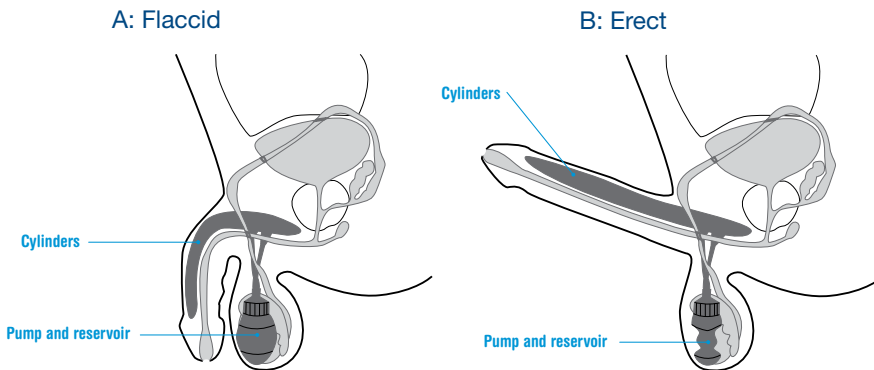


Penile prostheses

A penile prosthesis is a device that is surgically implanted into the penis and allows an erection to be created on demand by manipulating a part of the mechanism. A penile prosthesis permanently changes the interior structure of the penis. It is generally not used as a first line approach in the management of erection problems. Although quite an effective form of treatment, men are normally encouraged to try less invasive methods for a reasonable period of time before progressing to implants.

There a number of different types of implants available and it is advisable for a man and his partner to discuss this option fully with their doctor before proceeding. Some of the cost of the implant and the procedure may be claimable through certain levels of private health insurance cover.

Figure 6. Penile Prosthesis





A note about other therapies

Erectile dysfunction is a common problem and it is not unusual to see large advertisements in newspapers and magazines or on the internet for products and services offering treatment for this condition.

These treatments range from herbal preparations and natural therapies to nasal sprays, lozenges and cheap Viagra. Some of these products are unregulated and can be dangerous. After a diagnosis of prostate cancer, a man needs to be very cautious about using testosterone or natural products and herbs that may act like testosterone in the body. It is advisable to consult your doctor or pharmacist for advice before taking any of these preparations.

It is strongly recommended that men seek their doctor's advice before taking any additional medication to improve erections.

Tips for partners

A diagnosis of prostate cancer can be as difficult for a man's partner as it is for him. While the man is coming to terms with a potentially life threatening illness, you may be overwhelmed by a sense of helplessness as well as your own fears about the future. There can be added stress in your life and your relationship at this time.

You may find the following tips helpful:

► **Learn all you can about prostate cancer and its treatment**

The more you know about prostate cancer, the more you will know what to expect in terms of treatment, side effects and outcomes. Armed with this knowledge, you will have a better idea of what your spouse or partner is facing and can begin to overcome some of your uncertainty and anxiety. You can help him become more informed, to understand available treatments, and to make decisions about how to deal with prostate cancer. By helping your partner, you will help yourself.

► **Go with your partner to his medical appointments**

This will help you find out firsthand what the doctor has to say. It can allow you to find out the facts and deal with some of the misinformation that can come from well-meaning friends and family.

► **Attend Prostate Cancer Support Group meetings together**

Many couples find these groups helpful and supportive. You can both benefit from hearing and sharing experiences and concerns with others facing similar challenges.

► **Keep the lines of communication open**

Communication is critical during this stressful time. Talk to your partner about how you feel and encourage him to speak openly and honestly with you. Let him know that the disease, and the consequences of it, are not "his problem" alone — they are problems that you both share.

► **Be open about your own concerns.**

This is particularly important in relation to sexual intimacy - your honesty can help your partner confront his own anxieties and feelings of loss.

► **Listen to your partner.**

Really listen to how your partner is feeling and beware of minimising his concerns, “mind reading” or telling him how he should feel. Recognise that his way of dealing with this challenge may be different from yours.

► **Ask for help.**

If you feel confused or overwhelmed talk with your doctor or contact the **Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm**. Dealing with your own emotional turmoil will allow you to support your partner more effectively.

► **Allow time for closeness and sharing.**

Be aware of the comfort and reassurance of loving touch. Although there is often little you can do, never underestimate the power of a caring presence.

► **Take care of yourself.**

Give yourself time to do the things you enjoy. Allow yourself time to understand and accept your own feelings of loss and uncertainty about what lies ahead.

Moving Forward

Sex after prostate cancer can be different, however many men will still be able to enjoy a sexual relationship following their treatment. A number of options for achieving an erection have been mentioned and one or more of these is usually successful. Some men may find it necessary or may simply choose to experiment with other forms of sexual intimacy.

Remember your prostate cancer is not contagious. Your partner will not be harmed from minor urinary leakages during sex or by your cancer treatments. However, some changes will continue to affect you both, so it is helpful for your partner wherever possible, to be included in discussions about your sexuality and treatment choices.

It would be easy to over-simplify what happens with treatment, and the changes that follow. It seems it is the spontaneous rise of a rigid penis that men and their partners miss the most and it is important to acknowledge this loss. But it can also be something deeper. For many men it is the loss of a relationship - an easy relationship with the sexually responsive man they once were. As one man put it: "Erections and orgasms aren't gone, they are just more work. I am thankful for what I have, but I am still mourning what I may have permanently lost".

Each man and each couple will have their own journey with its unique pattern of highs and lows. Yet it is from experience and with wisdom that other survivors reassure us all that if you give yourself time to come into acceptance, your life although different, will in many aspects also be richer.

Further reading

The following books, available through general bookstores may be helpful for men and their partners.

Men, Women and Prostate Cancer: A Medical and Psychological Guide for Women and the Men they Love

by Barbara Rubin Wainrib, Ed.D and Sandra Haber, Ph.D. with Jack McGuire, New Harbinger Publications, Inc. (2000)

Intimacy with Impotence: The couples guide to better sex after prostate disease by Ralph and Barbara Alterowitz, Da Capo Lifelong Books (2004)

A Gay Man's Guide to Prostate Cancer edited by Gerald Perlman, Ph.D. and Jack Drescher, MD, The Haworth Medical Press (2005)

Websites that may be helpful

www.prostatepointers.org/mailman/listinfo/pcai

www.prostatehealth.org.au

www.andrologyaustralia.org

www.impotence.org.au

www.malecare.com

Finding Support

Prostate Cancer Support Groups

Prostate Cancer Support Groups offer information and support to men with cancer and to their partners, family and friends. To find contact and meeting details of a group in your local area, call the **Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm** or visit the website of the Queensland Chapter at www.pcfa.org.au/qld.

Partners of men with prostate cancer

In some areas, support groups have been established for the partners of men moving through diagnosis and treatment for prostate cancer. For details contact the **Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm**.

Cancer Connect

This program is run by Cancer Council Queensland. It allows men and also their partners to be in touch with trained volunteers who have shared a similar journey through diagnosis and treatment for prostate cancer. These volunteers are able to provide additional information and support that comes from their own personal cancer experience.

Cancer Connect Talk to someone who's been there

To find out
more call the

Cancer Council Queensland is inviting people who have been affected by cancer to seek support from trained volunteers who have had a similar cancer experience.



Suggested questions to ask your doctor about treatment and sexual function

- ▶ Will treatment affect my ability to have an erection?
- ▶ What changes can I expect after treatment?
- ▶ What can be done to minimise the risk of losing erections?
- ▶ How long might it take to recover erections?
- ▶ Will my libido be affected as well?
- ▶ I hear that surgery could shorten my penis. Is this so and will it affect performance?
- ▶ What is the longer term impact of treatment on sexual function?
- ▶ What is penile rehabilitation and when should I talk to someone about this?
- ▶ What can I do to improve erections?
- ▶ How soon after treatment should I begin treatment to improve erections?
- ▶ What results should I expect?
- ▶ What aftercare and access to support can I expect after surgery or radiation treatment?
- ▶ Will my age or health affect access to treatment for managing loss of erections?

Contacts

You may find that some of the information in this booklet does not apply to your personal situation. It is important to discuss your concerns about sexual function with a doctor who is familiar with your detailed medical history. Your treating urologist or general practitioner will be happy to assist you with this. Further information about cancer and support services in your local area can be obtained free of charge by calling the **Cancer Council Helpline on 13 11 20 Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm.**

Contacts:



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Cancer Council
Helpline

13 11 20

For information and support call
Monday to Friday, 8am - 6pm

www.cancerqld.org.au