

Erectile dysfunction

What is erectile dysfunction?

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is when you have ongoing trouble getting or keeping an erection firm enough for sexual activity. ED is common, especially during or after cancer treatment.

Changes in erections during and after cancer treatment are common. **You are not alone.** Support is available.

Why does ED happen?

Cancer treatment can affect how erections work. Common causes include:

- Reduced blood flow to the penis
- Nerve damage (for example, after prostate surgery)
- Low testosterone levels (including from hormone therapy)
- Stress, anxiety or depression
- Some medications, smoking or alcohol use

What is penile rehabilitation?

After treatments like surgery, radiation or long periods without erections, changes can happen in the penis. These may include:

- Loss of penile length
- Reduced firmness
- Decreased sensation

Penile rehabilitation is designed to help keep the penile tissue healthy and support the recovery of erectile function over time. It may be recommended even if you are not currently sexually active, do not have a partner or have a low interest in sex.

What are the goals of treatment?

Treatment for ED can have different goals based on what is most important to you.

Penile rehabilitation aims to:	Sexual function and pleasure aims to:
• Keep the penile tissue healthy • Maintain penile length and function • Support long-term recovery of erections	• Help you enjoy sexual activity • Improve sexual stimulation and pleasure • Support intimacy, with or without penetrative sex

Your healthcare team can help you choose treatments based on your goals and what is most important to you. Many people use a combination of approaches.

Treatment and rehabilitation options

Oral medications	These medications can help increase blood flow to the penis. These may be taken: • Before sexual activity to help you get an erection • Daily at a low dose as part of a penile rehabilitation program, if recommended by your healthcare team Examples include sildenafil (Viagra®) and tadalafil (Cialis®). Sexual stimulation is needed for these medications to work. Note: These medications do not increase sexual desire (libido).
Vacuum erection device (VED)	A device that uses gentle suction to bring blood into the penis. • Can be used with a constriction ring for sexual activity, or without a ring as part of penile rehabilitation • Non-invasive and drug-free Benefits: • Helps keep penile tissue healthy • Can support regular erections Works best when used with other treatments.
Penile injections	Medication is injected into the penis to create an erection. • Can work even if oral medications are not effective • Can provide a reliable erection Note: Training is needed before use.
Urethral suppositories	Medication is placed into the opening of the penis. • Less invasive than injections • May not work as well for some people
Penile implants (advanced option)	A surgical option when other treatments have not worked. • High satisfaction rates • Provides a reliable erection A penile implant is permanent. After surgery, other ED treatments are generally no longer effective.

Rehabilitation plan

A regular routine can help improve results. This may include:

- Daily low-dose medication (if prescribed)
- Regular use of a vacuum device (daily is best)
- Regular sexual stimulation (with or without a partner)
Aim for at least once per week.

When to seek help

Talk to your healthcare provider if:

- You are having ongoing difficulty with erections
- Treatments are not working as expected
- You would like support or more options

Scan the QR code or visit bit.ly/ccca_sexualhealth for more sexual health information and trusted online resources.

