

BETTER SEX BETTER SEX BETTER SEX BETTER SEX BETTER SEX

# WORRIED ABOUT STAYING HARD?

for men and  
their partners



“Sexual health is a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity.

Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence.

For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled.”

*Definition of sexual health, World Health Organisation*

## **SAFER SEX**

Using condoms for penetrative sex is the best way to protect yourself and your partners from Sexually Transmitted Infections, including HIV. Condoms also offer good protection from unwanted pregnancy. In the text of this booklet, we have chosen not to refer constantly to the use of condoms. Instead, we encourage you to make your own decisions about protecting yourself and others in each instance of sexual activity you undertake.

## IS IT REALLY A PROBLEM?

Having difficulty maintaining an erection (sometimes referred to as erectile dysfunction) is also commonly called impotence.

Most men experience occasional difficulty getting or maintaining an erection, usually as a result of tiredness, temporary stress or excessive alcohol consumption. Temporary loss of erections every now and then might feel stressful or embarrassing, but is not something to worry about. Difficulty getting and maintaining erections is more common among the over-60s, but it can affect men of any age.

However, if difficulties getting or maintaining erections becomes a long-term problem which interferes with your sex life, you might want to do something about it.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- *Does it mean I have lost interest in sex?*

No. In most cases men who have difficulty staying hard are still interested in sex, but their worries about staying hard can mean they begin avoiding sexual activities.

- *Is it inevitable with getting older?*

No, not inevitable. Minor changes in frequency and strength of erections are natural as men get older. Significant changes in your ability to get and maintain erections may suggest a difficulty related to something other than ageing.

- *Does it affect ejaculation and/or orgasm?*

Not necessarily. Most men who have difficulty staying hard are still able to have an orgasm and ejaculate.

- *I lose my erection when I put a condom on. Should I stop using them?*

No. Condoms are still the best protection from sexually transmitted infections and HIV. It's not the condom that causes you to lose your erection. It's the fact that you put it on just before penetration.

If a man is experiencing loss of erections, the point of penetration is often when it happens.

Although many men find using condoms tricky at times, the more you use them the easier it becomes. Using condoms can be built into the exercises described in the booklet ***How to Increase Your Enjoyment of Sex***, which you can pick up from the clinic. Ask a clinician to give you a copy if you can't find it on the leaflet racks.

## WHAT CAUSES ME NOT TO GET HARD OR TO LOSE MY ERECTION?

Difficulty getting or maintaining erections can be caused by a range of physical and psychological factors. A gradual onset of symptoms is more likely to point to a physical cause. The most common physical causes are:

- vascular disorders (problems that interfere with blood supply to the penis) such as diabetes, high blood pressure and atherosclerosis (hardening and narrowing of the arteries);
- lifestyle factors, such as smoking, alcohol and recreational drug use, poor nutrition;

- neurological disorders such as multiple sclerosis and stroke;
- surgery (e.g. for prostate cancer) and radiation therapy;
- drugs prescribed to treat high blood pressure, depression, heart disease and cancer.

A sudden difficulty in getting and maintaining an erection may have a psychological cause. Typically, if the problem is psychological, men continue to have erections while they sleep or when they wake up in the morning — demonstrating that their penis is able to become erect and remain so. Common psychological causes include:

- not being aroused by the situation;
- feeling bored sexually;
- worrying about sexual performance;
- relationship problems;
- guilt about sexual practices/partners;
- stress;
- being tired;
- having other things on your mind;

- hang-ups about using condoms;
- fears about transmitting or contracting a sexually transmitted infection (STI); and
- unresolved feelings about living with an STI or HIV.

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

If you think your difficulties have a physical cause, ask your doctor to explore this with you further. S/he may want to refer you to a specialist who may carry out some tests. If there is a physical problem, you may be offered some medical treatment such as prescribed drugs. If there are no medical problems, then it may be useful to consider psychological factors and how they can affect erections.

## HOW ERECTIONS WORK

It is important to remember that you don't have to do anything to make your penis hard. Erections are partly a natural automatic reflex and partly under your control (a bit like blinking). Erections happen when you are sexually excited, or 'turned on' — blood flow to the penis is increased, tissues inside the penis fill up with blood, and the penis expands and becomes hard.

This process is controlled by a part of the nervous system called the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), which is an involuntary, or automatic, system. Because it's involuntary, it has nothing to do with willpower — in fact, it's the opposite: the harder you try to get an erection, the less likely it is that you will.

The reason for this is that there's another system in the body, called the sympathetic nervous system (SNS), which cannot work at the same time as the PNS — when one is in control, the other closes down. The SNS controls the body when we feel stressed, anxious, or in danger — it's responsible for what is known as the 'fight or flight' response. It speeds up the heart rate, sends blood to the muscles in case we need to run or fight, and shuts down all non-essential functions — which includes erections.

When you're anxious or worried (whether about being in a sexual situation or about anything else), your body switches into SNS mode — which makes it almost impossible for you to get an erection. You have to be relaxed in order to become sexually aroused and erect.

Men can and do get erections (including first thing in the morning, in situations of danger, or when their penis is being physically stimulated) without

necessarily being sexually aroused in the sense of feeling desire. But if you've been having problems getting erections, you may feel you need to use any erection you get as quickly as possible, before it disappears again. This is usually a mistake — it puts you (and your penis) under pressure, which can set up patterns of performance anxiety and problems getting erections.

Some men feel bad about not having an erection because they feel as though they should reward their partner's efforts by having one. However, no-one 'owes' anyone an erection or an orgasm, just as your partner isn't obliged to 'deliver' an orgasm when you stimulate them. If either or both of you come, great — but sex is about pleasure, not about having erections and orgasms to please someone else.

If you think there might be psychological factors involved in your difficulties with getting or keeping an erection, there are some simple techniques that you can learn to help you overcome the problem.

## SOME GENERAL TIPS

Spend some time thinking about times when you have really enjoyed sex. Make a list of the factors that make the difference, for you, between 'good' and 'bad' sex. (If you aren't having any good experiences at the moment, use your memory or your imagination to help you list the things you think would be necessary for you to have good sex.) Try to be specific about what you need — it's important that you feel able to ask for what you want sexually. Your list could include, for instance: having privacy, not feeling rushed or under pressure, not being angry with your partner, being able to have the kind of sex that turns you on.

Try not to use morning erections for sex. Morning erections are more often the result of a full bladder and a need to urinate than a sign of arousal. You might be tempted to try and use your morning erection before you lose it, but you could be putting unhelpful pressure on yourself.

If you have a partner, consider talking to them about your concerns about staying hard — they might want to be involved in finding solutions. Read the booklet ***How to Increase Your Enjoyment of Sex***, which you can find on the leaflet racks at the clinic, or ask a

clinician for a copy. It contains practical exercises that you can do (alone or with a partner) that will help you get more pleasure from sex.

Some men find wearing a cock ring helps them stay hard, because it restricts the flow of blood out of the penis. Cock rings can be bought from sex shops or on the internet.

**“Writing is like making love.  
Don’t worry about the  
orgasm, just concentrate  
on the process.”**

*Isabel Allende*



## EXERCISES YOU CAN DO ON YOUR OWN

For the following exercises (except the first one) you should make sure you have plenty of time. The times given in brackets for each exercise are only suggestions; you may need less or more time for them. The important thing is that it should all be private, uninterrupted time. You need to be able to relax, switch off from other things, get into the mood and make sure you don't feel rushed or under pressure.

If you don't have enough time to do the exercises properly, or if you're worrying about what you're about to do afterwards, it might be better to wait till you have more time. If you have difficulty finding time to do the exercises, it might be helpful to plan time for them in advance.

### **EXERCISE** *a few minutes a day*

#### **KEGEL EXERCISES**

One method of enhancing your sexual experience is to use exercises to strengthen the pelvic muscles that, through their contractions, produce orgasm and ejaculation. Regular practice also improves the circulation of blood in the penis, which is necessary for getting erections. Men who do these exercises



regularly report improvements with getting hard as well as stronger and more pleasurable orgasms and better control over when they ejaculate.

You can feel these pelvic muscles if you contract your anus as though you're trying to hold back a bowel movement, or by stopping and starting the flow of urine when you're peeing. At first you might find you're contracting your stomach or thigh muscles as well, but with practice you can squeeze just the pelvic muscles.

Start off with squeezing and releasing these muscles fifteen times, a couple of times a day. You can do this without anyone noticing, for instance while driving, watching TV or waiting for a bus. Continue doing the Kegel exercises every day, gradually increasing the number until you can do 30 - 50 twice a day. At this point, instead of releasing the muscles immediately, you can start holding the contractions for a few seconds. You can do both the long and the short Kegels a couple of times a day, or alternate between them.

Most people don't notice any improvement until after about a month or six weeks, but if you practise them consistently you will feel the difference.

## **EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

### PLEASURING YOUR PENIS WHILE IT'S SOFT

The goal of this is to get more comfortable with touching your penis and discovering different sensations from different touches. It's better not to start off with an erection for this, but good to get yourself feeling sexy, for example by remembering a good sexual experience, thinking about a fantasy, or looking at arousing pictures or literature. Use lubricant (lube) if you like, and use one or both hands to touch your penis in ways that feel arousing, trying out different kinds of strokes and touches, and focusing on the sensations these produce.

Don't try to get hard, but if you do, pay close attention to the sensations you experience as your penis hardens. If your penis gets to what you reckon is about three-quarters of its full erection, stop touching it, and allow it to go down. Repeat this exercise two or three times until you:

- are more comfortable touching your penis when it's soft; and
- feel that you've improved your ability to focus on the pleasurable sensations produced.

## **EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

### MASTURBATION WITH FOCUSING

The goal of this exercise is to practise focusing on the sensations in your penis as you play with it, and to discover what types of touch and stroking feel best. You don't need to have an erection in this exercise, although it's OK if you get one.

Spend a bit of time getting yourself aroused, for example by remembering a good sexual experience, thinking about a fantasy, or looking at arousing pictures or literature. When you feel ready, start stroking your penis slowly and gently, concentrating your attention "inside" your penis so that you are aware of the sensations the stroking is producing. Use lubricant if you like.

Experiment with different strokes. For example, try stroking the whole length, just the head, just the shaft, using a circular motion, different pressures and speeds (but not too fast). There are many nerve endings in your penis that respond to stimulation, with sensations that may differ depending on how excited you are, how hard or soft you are, and what kind of touching you're doing. Take your time — it's not about speed or reaching a goal. Spend about 15 minutes exploring the sensations you're feeling, playing with them and enjoying them.

If you feel close to coming before the 15 minutes is up, stop masturbating and wait a minute or two until the urge to come subsides before continuing. After the 15 minutes, if you want to come you can do, but keep going slowly and keep focusing on the sensations. Remember, you don't have to come at all, so only do so if you want to — the point of this exercise is to explore masturbation while being focused on the process, not on having an orgasm.

You can do this exercise several times a week.

## POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *You don't feel any sensations in your penis, or they don't feel very interesting.*

This probably means you're not focusing very strongly — or you may be expecting something unrealistic. Try just being curious about the sensations and notice what there is, rather than wondering whether they're "good enough".

- *Your mind keeps wandering.*

This is natural; just keep bringing your attention back to the exercise.

- *You can't relax or focus on the sensations.*

It's important that you aren't tense, in a hurry, or very preoccupied with something else. If you are, it might be better to leave it till another time. If you're worrying about not being hard enough, remind yourself about the purpose of the exercise, and try again to focus on the various sensations.

### **EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

#### LOSING AND GAINING ERECTIONS

Stroke your penis, using lube if you wish, and focus either on the sensations or on an exciting fantasy. When you get an erection, enjoy it for a moment, and then stop the stimulation by taking your hand away. Let your erection go down — this may take a few seconds or a few minutes. When it's soft again, go back to stimulating it and focusing on the sensations and/or the fantasy. Usually, you will get another erection — at which point, stop the stimulation again and let yourself get soft.

Two cycles of this exercise (i.e. stimulation, erection, stopping and losing erection; stimulation, erection, stopping and losing erection) is enough for any one session.

If your erection doesn't return within a few minutes of going back to stimulation, check whether you're comfortable and relaxed, and if you're not, take a few deep breaths and try thinking about a different arousing fantasy. Look at stimulating pictures if you like. If this doesn't produce an erection, don't worry — just return to the exercise another time.

Do this exercise every other day or so, until you reach the point where you're fairly confident that you can regain your erection by using physical and mental stimulation.

**NB** You may find that you don't always get your erection back. If you do most of the time, that's fine. Most men have grown up thinking that they should always get erections easily, but all men have times when their penises don't respond to stimulation, and this is nothing to worry about.

Most often, it's the pressure we put on ourselves, and our anxiety about whether we'll be able to get one, that makes erections less likely. Once you accept that occasionally it just won't happen, it will become less of a problem.



## **EXERCISE** *20-25 minutes*

### MASTURBATION WITH FANTASY OF SEX WITH A PARTNER

**Step A:** Masturbate (with lube if you like) while fantasising about a sexual experience with a partner (this could be a previous partner, someone you know, or someone imaginary). Start the fantasy with the first touch or kiss, and slowly imagine all the activities which might occur in this imaginary sexual encounter.

For instance, you might want to include kissing, hugging, removing clothes, playing with their genitals, them touching your penis, oral sex, anal sex, them penetrating you, being inside without movement, moving slowly, and moving more rapidly. (Of course, not all of these have to happen, or in this order, in real sexual encounters — this exercise is about imagining all the possible sexual activities you might encounter.)

It may be that particular activities or parts of this imagined sequence will make you feel anxious or uncomfortable. If this happens, slow down or stop masturbating and take some deep breaths to become more relaxed and reduce the anxiety, and in the fantasy visualise doing something with your partner to make you feel more comfortable. For example, imagine yourself telling them you'd like them to slow

down, or asking them just to hold you for a while, or picture yourself turning your attention to pleasuring them to take the focus off yourself, or explaining to them how you're feeling — whatever helps you to feel less anxious. Then go back to masturbating and in your fantasy go back to sexual activities.

If you find your anxiety rising again at the same point, go to Step B. Otherwise, continue with fantasising all the possible activities you might encounter. It's important to do this fantasy slowly and thoroughly, so you may well not be able to get through all of them in a single session, but you can begin your fantasy at a later stage when you come back to the exercise (for example, already being undressed).

**Step B:** Most men find that one or more fantasised activities (for example, being touched, or penetration) cause difficulty. These activities are likely to make you feel anxious in reality as well, so if you find one that doesn't get easier after a few repetitions, devote more attention to it.

Get yourself feeling relaxed and sexual first, and slowly begin masturbating. Then imagine the difficult activity in stages (a bit like freeze-frames on a video) and don't move onto the next stage until you feel comfortable with the one you're on.

For example, suppose it's having your partner touch your penis that feels difficult. You might start by imagining their hand just lightly brushing past your penis, and stay with that image until your anxiety drops. Then you might see them resting their hand against your penis, and when you feel comfortable with that, imagine them holding it. Only then move onto imagining them stroking you, and gradually build up the length of time you can fantasise about this comfortably.

You'll need to repeat this exercise as many times as it takes to be able to go through it without feeling anxious. When you can do that, go back to Step A and incorporate the activity into a wider fantasy.

If you find another scene that gives you difficulty, use Step B again. Continue until you can go through your entire fantasy in Step A while continuing to feel relaxed and sexy.

It's better if you don't come during this exercise, as it's very important to explore the fantasy fully, so take your time. You'll probably need to stop a number of times to get relaxed, and may need to do Step B a few times as well, so it will take several sessions at least. However, learning how to feel relaxed while imagining activities that previously made you anxious and uncomfortable will make a huge difference.

It can be a good idea to imagine all the possible things that might happen in a real sexual encounter too, such as not being able to get or keep an erection, or losing it on penetration. Again, get yourself relaxed, and imagine possible ways you could deal with these things that would relieve the pressure and anxiety. The more you do this, the less likely you are to worry so much about those events happening, which in turn makes them less likely to happen.







## EXERCISES YOU CAN DO WITH A PARTNER

Before starting any of these exercises, both you and your partner should read and discuss them. Talk about your feelings about doing the programme and sort out any issues that are raised. It's common for couples to have some disagreements, but if you sort them out as soon as they appear, you'll get more benefit from the programme.

These exercises are like a training programme. You won't have to do them forever, but how long you need to do them depends mainly on how often you do them, so you need to work out an agreement about frequency. Don't plan to do more than one exercise per day — a couple of times a week is a good starting point.

You also need to agree that neither of you will push the other faster than they want to go. For example, you might agree that you are happy to satisfy your partner with your hands or mouth when they want, but not with your penis until you feel ready to (or vice versa). It's important not to rush through the programme, as this just puts pressure on you both. The point of it is to allow yourselves to enjoy taking things at the pace that feels right for you, not to push yourselves into doing what you think someone else expects.



Don't make these exercises the only contact you have with your partner, either physically or emotionally. Make sure you also have mutually satisfying time when you're not restricted by the programme, and that you can express affection physically without needing to end up having sex. For ideas about how to do this, pick up a copy of *How to Increase Your Enjoyment of Sex – for men and their partners* from the clinic.

The basic principle is that you do the exercises only at your own speed. If you start feeling anxious or uncomfortable, stop and do something that helps you to feel more comfortable, and only go back to the activity when you're more relaxed. It's a good idea to agree together beforehand what you will do if you want to stop — this could be cuddling, talking, stimulating your partner instead, or doing something non-sexual together.

You might want to do the exercises both ways round, so that it feels fair, or you might prefer to focus on the partner who would benefit most from them — it's up to you to decide together how you use them.

**EXERCISE** *15-20 minutes*

**SEXY BODY RUB WITHOUT TOUCHING GENITALS**

Have your partner arouse you by touching your body, not including your genitals, using their hands, mouth, hair or anything else — be as creative as you like! Give feedback and suggestions, without being critical. Your job is to focus on the sensations and feelings which develop from different kinds of touch — this includes feeling sexually aroused but also other sensations, such as ticklishness. If you find your mind wandering, bring it back to focusing on the sensations.

**EXERCISE** *15-20 minutes*

**PARTNER PLAYS WITH YOUR PENIS WHILE IT'S SOFT**

This exercise is designed to help you feel more comfortable about being touched when your penis is not erect. Many men believe they should be hard before being touched, or that they should get hard as soon as a partner touches them, but these can be unrealistic expectations.

It's very important that you learn to be comfortable with being touched when you're soft, as this allows you to learn to enjoy stimulation that can get you

erect. Even if you don't get hard, it will still feel good, and the more comfortable you become with your partner touching you when you're not erect, the more enjoyable it will feel — and thus the more likely it is that you'll get an erection.

Get yourselves relaxed and comfortable, and allow your partner to play with your penis while it's soft. Don't try to get an erection; if you do, stop for a while until you become soft again. Your partner can explore, caress, stroke, and just generally play with your penis in whatever way they like (but nothing that's painful or uncomfortable). Try to keep your attention on the sensations you experience.

Do this exercise as many times as it takes for you to feel completely comfortable being touched when you're soft.

## POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *You find yourself trying to get an erection, or feeling bad for not having one.*

This is understandable. Try to let go of your worries about your erection and make sure that both you and your partner know that the point of the exercise is that your penis should be soft.



**EXERCISE** *15-30 minutes*

**SEXY BODY RUB WITH GENITALS**

Another way of developing a good relationship between your penis and a partner is to gently rub it on their body, whether it's hard or soft. You can rub it anywhere on them, including, when you're comfortable, rubbing against their pubic hair and between their thighs and buttocks. Again, stop and get more comfortable if you find yourself becoming tense. Go slowly, keep your attention on your penis, and allow it and you to explore your partner.

**EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

**PARTNER STIMULATION OF YOUR PENIS**

This time your partner is to touch and stroke your genitals, with a lubed hand if you like, as you direct them. It's the same as the sexy body rub, but focusing on the genitals this time. Some men prefer to begin with kissing and touching.

The goal is to get as turned on as possible, but it's about arousal, rather than erection — if you get an erection, that's fine, but the exercise works just as well if you don't. Concentrate on the sensations you feel, not just in your penis but all over your body.

Give feedback and directions in words that turn you on, and allow any sexual images or ideas to emerge.

During the exercise, you can touch your partner in any way you like that excites you, but only for your pleasure — you're not to try and turn them on at this point. This is difficult for many men, as they are used to being active, and/or they want to return the favour. However, the point of the exercise is to focus on one person at a time. You can always do the exercise the other way around afterwards if you like.

If you become aroused and keep focusing on your sensations, you will probably get an erection for some of the time. If you want to ejaculate, that's fine, but it's not necessary. Men vary hugely in how often they need to do this exercise before they become comfortable with it and get good at focusing on sensations, re-focusing when the mind wanders, and giving good directions to their partner to provide the best possible stimulation.

## POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *You never get an erection in this exercise, or don't keep it for long.*

It may be that you can't get your partner to stimulate you in the way you like, in which case you need to talk about what's going wrong, and perhaps go back to one of the earlier exercises. If your mind keeps wandering, especially to negative thoughts or anxieties, you need to practice turning it back to the sensations and concentrating on these. It may help if you can share your anxieties with your partner, or with a supportive friend.

If you can usually get erections when you masturbate, but not with your partner, then there may be something in the relationship that's getting in the way. You might need to think, alone or with your partner, about what this might be.

- *Your partner wonders why you don't get an erection*

Some partners may take your lack of an erection to mean that you're not attracted to them, that they're not attractive enough, or that they aren't doing the right things to turn you on or stimulate you. Of course, it could be true that you're not really attracted to them or that they're not giving you the kind of stimulation that excites you. If you're not attracted to them, it may be unrealistic to expect yourself to get an erection. If they're not stimulating you in the ways you like, perhaps you

could let them know what they could do differently.

If neither of these are the case, you need to find a way of explaining what's happening and making it clear that it isn't their fault. But it's also a good idea not to apologise — you haven't done anything wrong and there's nothing to be ashamed of. Apologising in this situation may mean you end up putting yourself down and believing it's your fault. All you need to do is tell them what's happening, as honestly and directly as you can — this is respectful to both yourself and them.

Below are some examples of how other men have successfully explained it — they may help you decide what you would say in this situation:

“I don't exactly understand what's going on but I can tell I'm not going to get an erection at the moment. I like you and I'm really turned on by you, and you've been doing everything I could want. I think it's because I do like you and I want to be a good lover with you, so I'm trying too hard, and when I do that my penis goes on strike. I'd like to leave it alone for a while. But if it's OK with you I'd like to go on touching you some more.”

“I’m going to level with you — I’ve been having some problems getting erections. I’m getting some help with it and I hoped that it would be different with you. But I know that I’m still quite nervous about it and that’s getting in the way of me getting hard. I’m pretty sure I’m not going to get an erection tonight, but I’d love to do something to give you pleasure.”

It’s fair to say that some partners may be put off by you not having an erection, whatever you say. That may be because of their own insecurities about their attractiveness or sexual competence, or for some other reason that means they find it hard to deal with any problems.

If you’re with someone like this, there’s not much you can do, and staying in the situation will probably only make you feel worse about yourself and increase the pressure you put on yourself to perform. Unless they can accept your situation and what’s going on for you sexually, you may not get very far, and you might consider whether it’s worth staying in the situation. If you find someone who’s interested in more than just a rigid penis, who is a bit more understanding and supportive, you’re likely to get erections more easily.

All the same, it's worth remembering that you won't always get erections when you think you should, you'll lose erections sometimes, and sometimes your erections may not be as full or as hard as you'd like. This is true for all men at some point in their lives. And there will be times when you just don't feel like sex — your sex drive can be affected by tiredness, by stress or worries, by the state of your relationship, and by some medications, for example.

**EXERCISE** *15-20 minutes*

**ORAL STIMULATION OF YOUR PENIS**

This exercise is identical to the previous one, except that your partner stimulates your penis with their mouth rather than with their hands. Use whatever position is comfortable for both of you, but resist the temptation to stimulate them at the same time — just focus and give directions.

By now you should be becoming confident of getting an erection most of the time when you have the proper conditions and stimulation. You now need to learn that it is really OK to lose your erection with your partner — usually you will be able to regain it, and even when you don't, you can both still have a good time.

**EXERCISE** *15-20 minutes***LOSING AND REGAINING YOUR ERECTION**

Have your partner stimulate your penis, with their hands or mouth, in ways that you like. Your goal, as always, is to focus on the sensations and get as aroused as possible. When you have an erection, enjoy it for a moment, then ask them to stop and allow your erection to go down. You can do whatever you want while you wait (chat about other things, give your partner a back rub or a sensual massage), but take as long as you need for your penis to go soft. Then get your partner to begin stimulating you again. When you get hard, get them to stop again, as before. Do two or three repetitions (stimulation, erection, stopping stimulation, erection fades) in one session.

You won't always regain your erection and you won't always get one in the first place. When either of these happen, try being open about it — you could say something like, "I guess it's not going to get hard today. I'd like you to stop." Then discuss what you'd both like to do instead. They might want you to sexually stimulate them, or you might want to talk about what's happening, or you could go and do something else together.

## POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *You never get an erection.*

This usually means you haven't yet mastered the earlier exercises and need to go back and spend more time on them.

- *Your erection doesn't go down very quickly.*

This isn't really a problem, it just increases the length of time it takes to do the exercise properly. Make sure that what you're doing while you wait to go soft isn't arousing you, and if it is, do something different to help you get soft again. Just walking around the room can be enough.

- *Once you lose your erection, you don't get it back.*

The problem here is usually anxiety about getting the erection back. In other words, you're forgetting how to focus on the sensations and are worrying instead. Remember, you don't have to actually do anything to become hard, it's an automatic reaction which has nothing to do with willpower — in fact, the more you try, the less it happens automatically. Just keep concentrating on your sensations and arousing thoughts.



## EXERCISES FOR PENETRATION

These exercises apply to both anal and vaginal penetrative sex with men or women. For more information about anal sex, pick up the booklet *Anal Play – for men and for women* in the clinic. Check out with your partner beforehand that they understand the point of the exercise and are willing to follow your pace, and remember that the keys to pleasurable penetrative sex are communication, relaxation and lubrication — you can't have too much of any of them.

**EXERCISE** *usually less than 10 minutes*  
GRADUAL INSERTION OF PENIS

This exercise needs you to have an erection (though not necessarily a very hard one), so it's important that you don't feel under any pressure or anxiety to perform. If you do, leave the exercise for another time and do something else enjoyable with your partner. You can use spontaneous erections or those that occur during other sexual activities.

The goal is for you to insert your penis gradually, in stages. Firstly place your erect penis just at the opening of your partner's vagina or anus. Use a



position which is comfortable for both you, and check that your partner is feeling aroused and relaxed.

Spend a few seconds getting used to having it there. When you feel comfortable, move it in a little bit. Again, take a few moments to get used to the feeling. Continue in this way until you are fully inside, and stay still for a few minutes and focus on the sensations in your penis when it is surrounded by your partner's body.

If you want to ejaculate and it's OK with them, you can do so, but move slowly and stay aware of what's happening with the sensations in your penis and body.

If at any stage you feel your erection starting to go down, stay focused and see if you can enjoy the sensations of your penis going down.

Do this exercise until you can stay inside your partner for about a minute without moving but keeping your erection. If your penis gets softer, and you're wearing a condom, take care when you withdraw.

## **EXERCISE** *15 minutes*

### **PENIS INSIDE WITH MOVEMENT**

If you are the one penetrating your partner, a good position for this exercise is you lying on your back and your partner sitting on top of you — this allows you to fully relax with the bed supporting your weight.

However, find the position that works best for you both— it needs to be comfortable enough for you both to stay in it for 5 or 10 minutes.

**Step A:** This is similar to the previous exercises, except that one of you moves slowly. It doesn't matter which of you it is, and will depend on what position you're using — whoever's on top will do the moving. Whether it's you or them doing the moving, it's your job to be in charge of how much movement, when to stop, and when to resume. The point is for you to focus on sensations and get as aroused as possible. It's important that your partner doesn't start thrusting to satisfy themselves — that will come later.

Start at a very slow pace and make sure you're comfortable with it before increasing the pace. Then go a little faster, and when that feels OK (no anxiety or negative thoughts), increase the pace again. Continue until the person who's active is moving at a good pace, but not all-out — say around 80% of what

would be typical in a non-exercise situation. It will probably take more than one 15-minute session to get to this point, but you will find that over several sessions you can build up the pace more quickly than previously. When you can do that, move onto Step B.

**Step B:** This is the same as Step A except that you take it in turns to move during the thrusting, one at a time for a few moments each. Start with very slow movements and only increase the pace as you feel comfortable. Use as many sessions as you need.

**Step C:** As before, but with you and your partner both moving during the thrusts. Start at a pace which is very comfortable and build up gradually. Stay focused, and if you become anxious or start to lose your erection, stop and relax before resuming at a slower pace, gradually increasing the pace again when you're comfortable. If you do this consistently, you'll become able to tolerate and enjoy more and more movement.

When you're comfortable with uninhibited movement in one position, you can try other positions. You don't need to do this as part of a formal exercise, but remember that at first any new position can be a bit awkward and/or uncomfortable. When you first try out a new position, start moving slowly, and only when you're comfortable work up to a pace that suits you both.

## POSSIBLE PROBLEMS

- *You lose your erection during penetration.*

This happens once in a while for most men, but if it's a real problem, there are some things you can try. Make sure you're relaxed — if you're not, take some deep breaths and focus on arousing thoughts and images. If you're already inside your partner, you can stay there and try to get the stimulation you want — for example, by moving in certain ways or getting them to squeeze their pelvic muscles. Or you can withdraw from them and use whatever stimulation works well for you, and go back to penetration when you're hard again.

- *You always lose your erection at a certain point.*

If this happens at a similar point during sex, for example when your partner starts moving quickly, you can try this out when you're alone. Take a few moments to get relaxed and imagine your partner moving slowly during sex. Continue to relax and imagine them moving a little faster. Continue with this, slowly increasing their speed in your imagination, until you can calmly imagine them moving at full speed and still keep your erection.

Then do the same thing for real with your partner — relax and have them move slowly during sex, and only let them increase the pace a little at a time, making sure that you stay relaxed. If they reach a speed that makes you begin to feel tense or anxious, have them slow down immediately to a pace where you feel relaxed (even if this is stationary), and don't increase the pace until you're completely comfortable with the speed you're at. If you do this consistently, you'll become able to tolerate and enjoy more and more movement.

- *What if I still have problems?*

You might find it helpful to read other booklets in this series (see back cover). You can pick them up from the booklet racks at the clinic, or ask a clinician for a copy. Or you could ask your doctor about getting referred to a psychosexual counsellor or therapist, or contact one of the organisations listed overleaf.

## RECOMMENDED READING:

*The New Male Sexuality: The Truth about Men, Sex and Pleasure*

Bernie Zilbergeld, Bantam Doubleday Dell

*Sexual Health for Men: The 'At your Fingertips' Guide*

Phillip Kell and Vanessa Griffiths, CLASS Publishing

*Overcoming Sexual Problems: A self-help guide using Cognitive Behavioural Techniques*

Vicki Ford, Robinson

*The Relate Guide to Sex In Loving Relationships*

Sarah Litvinoff, Vermillion

## FINDING PSYCHOSEXUAL/RELATIONSHIP THERAPY:

For further information about the services we provide, including psychosexual therapy, STI testing and sexual health advice, visit [www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk](http://www.londonSTItesting.nhs.uk)

**British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy (BASRT)**

Information and lists of individual and couple psychosexual therapists

<http://www.basrt.org.uk>      020 8543 2707

**Society for the Advancement of Sexual Health**  
[www.sashuk.org.uk](http://www.sashuk.org.uk)

**PACE**

Sexual health and relationship counselling for  
lesbians and gay men  
[www.pacehealth.org.uk](http://www.pacehealth.org.uk)

**RELATE**

Psychosexual counselling for men and women of all  
sexualities  
[www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)

**Relationship Counselling for London**

[www.counselling4london.com](http://www.counselling4london.com) 020 8938 2431

**GMFA**

Groups and workshops for men who have sex with men  
[www.gmfa.org.uk](http://www.gmfa.org.uk)



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**WORRIED ABOUT STAYING HARD?**

for men and their partners

**ANAL PLAY**

for men and for women

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for men and their partners

**HOW TO INCREASE YOUR ENJOYMENT OF SEX**

for women and their partners

**DIFFICULTIES WITH PENETRATION  
OR PAINFUL SEX?**

for women and their partners