

Erectile dysfunction - article 2

Last month I wrote the first of two articles looking at the causes of erectile dysfunction. The first if you missed it can be viewed at www.selfhealclinic.co.nz.

It is often assumed that hormonal imbalance is the major contributor to erectile problems, and for many men this is the case. However, circulation of blood plays just as big a part in good sex function for men because the penis relies upon inflation through an influx of blood in response to the hormonal signals received. Men with heart disease, hypertension, high cholesterol and/or who smoke are typically those most affected.

Heart disease, high cholesterol and hypertension do not occur without reason. They are typically signs of a history of nutrient-poor diets and poor lifestyle choices.

The typical New Zealand diet is high in processed carbohydrates such as bread, biscuits, home baking, processed cereals, things sweetened with sugar, processed dairy foods and convenience foods. It is generally too low in vegetables, fresh fruit and good quality protein foods. Not only does this predispose us to conditions like diabetes, it means we have diets which deplete us of vital nutrients such as vitamin C, magnesium, zinc and the B vitamins which protect our cardiovascular health. The first thing to do to correct any problem caused by poor circulation is to address the relevant nutrient depletions and to replace the foods which typically create a drain on the nutrient reserves. There is no replacement for eating whole, fresh, unrefined, and unprocessed foods. Include fruits (lots of richly pigmented berries to support vascular integrity), vegetables, whole grains, beans, seeds, nuts, flaxseed and olive oil, and cold-water fish (salmon, unflavoured tuna, sardines, halibut, and mackerel). Avoid sugar, dairy products (with the exception of unsweetened yoghurt), refined foods, fried foods, junk foods, and caffeine. Avoid alcohol, especially beer. (See my previous article as to why).

Certain nutrients can be very helpful in aiding the relaxation of blood vessels. Magnesium, calcium and B3 are very good. Depending on the nutritional state of the individual, higher doses may be required than those typically found in over-the-counter supplements. There are three forms of B3 available, and it is important to get the right one. This is best determined by the other factors presenting for that person.

L-arginine is an amino acid that the body uses to make nitric oxide, a substance that signals smooth muscle surrounding the blood vessels to relax. This dilates the blood vessels and increases blood flow. Relaxation of smooth muscle in the penis allows for enhanced blood flow, leading to an erection. Nitric oxide formation depends on sufficient levels of L-arginine in the body and has been found particularly effective for men with abnormal nitric oxide metabolism. L-arginine is not recommended in patients following an acute heart attack, and because it can have unpredictable effects on insulin and cholesterol-lowering agents I would advise not using it with these medications. If you are going to try it, start with low doses and do not exceed the stated doses.

Hypertension and high cholesterol should always be addressed. Failure to do so is to fail to address the cardiovascular issues affecting blood supply to the whole body, not just the penis.

Vitamin C maintains the integrity of the veins and arteries. Anyone with a history of varicose veins, edema, hemorrhoids, bleeding gums or with broken veins showing in the skin needs vitamin C. Vitamin C enables the body to repair blood vessels using collagen which also keeps their elasticity. Without, the blood vessels become harder and less

flexible which results in high blood pressure. There is now good evidence that in the absence of adequate vitamin C, the body will use fatty plaques to try to repair blood vessel damage, leading to atherosclerosis which narrows the blood vessels, also leading to high blood pressure. A good vitamin C product should always contain bioflavonoids, and doses in the region of 1000mg 3 times a day (or to bowel tolerance) are usually required long term.

Check that the erectile dysfunction is not a side effect of medications. If it is, just adding supplements will not be particularly helpful. The reasons for the medication need to be looked at, and where possible, corrective measures undertaken.

A combination of Ginkgo and Ginger can be helpful where the circulation is simply sluggish. Both of these herbs increase arterial blood flow which may have a positive effect on male sexual function. These herbs should however not be used concurrently with any blood thinning medications such as aspirin or warfarin.

Long term smoking can be an over-looked reason for erectile dysfunction. It has well-known links with heart disease, which come about primarily through the way the chemicals and metals in the cigarettes change the nutrient status of the body. Smokers are commonly depleted in vitamins C, E, the B vitamins and zinc – all vital for good circulation. Cigarettes also contain a number of heavy metals which will displace beneficial minerals. Copper, lead, and cadmium levels are often greatly increased in long term cigarette smokers. Copper and cadmium both compete with zinc, and we have already discussed the vital role that zinc plays in male reproductive health. Cadmium has proven links with hypertension, and smokers typically have twice as much cadmium in their bodies as nonsmokers. Interestingly, the accumulation of copper, lead, and cadmium has also been shown to occur in cataract formation, another disease which occurs with nutrient depletion and poor circulation.

Aerobic exercise and weight training support the cardiovascular system, increase blood flow and overall energy, and promote relaxation while at rest. A particular set of exercises called Kegels exercises can be helpful to specifically increase pelvic blood flow and muscle tone. Information of these can be found on Google.

It pays to remember that if the underlying reason for the erectile dysfunction is poor circulation it may take time to correct, but ultimately the whole body will benefit.

If you have any queries regarding the information in this article or would like to address some health issues of your own, we encourage you to call us on 06 304 8177. The dispensary is open 9.30am – 4pm Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and 10.30am – 4pm Saturday. Previous articles can be viewed on www.selfhealclinic.co.nz.