

The Great Sex After 40 Guide To Erection Medications

Summary

In 1998, the Food and Drug Administration approved Viagra as a treatment for erectile dysfunction (ED, formerly impotence). It took the world by storm. Two similar drugs were approved in 2003, Levitra and Cialis,. One older medication is also available, yohimbine (Aphmrodyne, Yocon). Drugs are not the answer to every man's erection problem, and surprisingly, fewer than 10 percent of men over 50 use them. But they certainly have a place in treatment of ED.

Erection drugs work by opening the arteries that carry blood into the penis. More blood means greater likelihood of erection.

Advantages of erection medications:

- Work for 60 to 80 percent of men.
- Help ED caused by both psychological issues and physical ailments.
- Don not produce instant erections. Fondling is necessary, so they appear “natural.”
- Fairly safe.
- Modest cost.

Disadvantages:

- Don't work for every man with ED.
- Don't produce rock-hard, pornography-style erections.
- Have no effect on libido. All they do is increase likelihood of erection.
- May cause fatalities in men taking nitrate medications (nitroglycerine and amyl nitrate or “poppers”).
- Slight increase in risk of heart attack and stroke.

Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis start to work after about an hour. Viagra and Levitra last a few hours. Cialis lasts up to 36 hours.

Don't buy erection drugs over the Internet.

Yohimbine is controversial, but the weight of the evidence supports it.

Erection drugs have a place in great sex after 40. But there's more to sex than an erection. With or without an erection, great sex requires an emotional connection and leisurely, playful, whole-body sensuality that includes the genitals but is not preoccupied with them.

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The GSA40 Guide To Erection Medications

The world of erection impairment changed dramatically on March 27, 1998, the day the Food and Drug Administration approved the little blue pill, Viagra, for treatment of erection impairment, now medically called “erectile dysfunction” (ED). Viagra was not the first approved drug treatment for ED (see yohimbine below), but it was the one that captured the public's imagination. Viagra took the U.S.—and the world—by storm. During its first month of availability, American doctors wrote more than 300,000 prescriptions, making Viagra the fastest-selling new drug in history.

In 2003 two other drugs similar to Viagra were approved, Levitra and Cialis.

Erection medication is not the answer to every man's erection problem. Many erection difficulties are caused by relationship stresses and resolve when the problems are resolved. Other cases of ED are caused by sexual anxiety, and clear up when men learn more about sex, relax about it, and adopt a less penis-centered, more whole-body-sensuality approach to lovemaking. Medical problems, particularly diabetes and heart disease are major causes of ED, and may resolve when the illnesses are treated. Many erection problems are caused by drugs (notably alcohol and cigarettes) and drug side effects, and can be helped by cutting back on alcohol, quitting smoking, and tinkering with prescriptions.

In addition, for several reasons, many older couples evolve their lovemaking away from vaginal intercourse, and don't need drugs that make it possible or easier. Despite lubricants, many postmenopausal women find vaginal intercourse uncomfortable. Recent research shows that fewer than 10 percent of men over 50 have tried the erection drugs, and many who have find them ineffective or disappointing and don't refill their prescriptions. Nonetheless, erection medications certainly have a place in the treatment of ED.

How Erection Medications Work

Viagra, Levitra, Cialis, and yohimbine all work basically the same way: Sexual arousal stimulates release of a compound in the penis, nitric oxide. It triggers synthesis of another compound, cGMP, which relaxes the penis' smooth muscle tissue. As smooth muscle tissues relaxes, the arteries that carry blood into the penis open (dilate), and extra blood to flow into the organ's spongy central erectile tissues. Erection drugs enhance this smooth muscle relaxation, spurring greater blood flow into the penis.

Advantages

Erection drugs work reasonably well. Most studies show "significant benefit" in about 60 to 80 percent of men.

They help men with ED caused by both physical illness and stress/anxiety problems.

They do not produce instant erection. Erotic fondling is still required. No walking around with an embarrassing bulge in your pants that signals you've taken a drug. The effect looks and feels natural—and the lover may never know that a man has used a drug.

For most, but not all men, these drugs are also quite safe. The only significant side effects are headache (16 percent of users), flushing (10 percent), upset stomach (7 percent), nasal congestion (4 percent), and rarely, visual disturbances, mostly in men with severe diabetes or chronic eye conditions such as macular degeneration.

Few health insurers cover erection medications. But even without insurance coverage, these drugs are quite affordable. The Viagra dose most men take, 50 mg, costs about \$10, a modest price to pay for an amorous evening free from erection worries.

Disadvantages

Erection drugs don't work in about 25 percent of cases. As severity of ED increases, their effectiveness decreases. For example, the drugs work well in many men with the beginnings of diabetic ED, but less well in diabetics with considerable cardiovascular and neurological damage. Even in men with mild

erection balkiness, these drugs may not work in some situations, for example, if you feel particularly stressed, distracted, or alienated from the sexual experience.

Even when they work, the erection drugs do not produce the kind of rock-hard erections men see in pornography. Porn actors are overwhelmingly young men at the stage of life when erections are most firm (not to mention that porn actors pop erection drugs like candy). After 40, erections become less firm and firmness continues to subside with advancing age. A man in his fifties who takes a drug may have a firmer erection than he would without the medication. But chances are it won't be as firm as the erections he recalls from his twenties.

Erection medications are *not* aphrodisiacs in the traditional sense of libido stimulants. They do not boost sexual desire. All they do is increase the likelihood of erection. This is a major reason why some men feel disappointed with the drugs. In young men, erection and arousal are typically linked. When a man feels aroused, he gets an erection, and when he has an erection, he feels aroused. But in older men, erection and arousal become uncoupled. For some, this begins around age 40. By age 50, most men find it more difficult to become aroused. Even when a drug aids an older man's erections, he may not feel particularly aroused.

Finally, some men should *absolutely never* use Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis—those taking nitrate medication for heart disease, notably nitroglycerine for angina, or the party drug, amyl nitrate (“poppers”). The combination of Viagra and nitrate drugs can cause a precipitous drop in blood pressure—and possibly death. Before this problem was identified, the combination of Viagra and nitrate medication killed more than 500 men. If you take any nitrate drug, *don't* use Viagra, Levitra, or Cialis. However, yohimbine drugs do not have this problem, so the vast majority of men taking nitrate drugs can use them safely. (There have been a few deaths with yohimbine drugs, but they are very rare.)

In addition, Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis are associated with a small increased risk of heart attack and stroke. They slightly increase the tendency for blood to clot. Internal blood clots trigger heart attack and most strokes. Men with histories of heart attack and stroke should consult their doctors before using these drugs, and consider taking an anticoagulant, for example, aspirin, along with them to reduce risk of internal clots.

Duration of Action: A Few Hours or Up to 36

Viagra and Levitra take about an hour to begin having an effect. They last another 2 hours or so, longer in some men. In fact, the latest studies show that many men experience benefit for up to eight hours.

Cialis also takes about an hour to work, but it lasts for 24 to 36 hours, hence the claim that it's the "hot weekend drug." Take Cialis on Saturday morning, and you're good to go through most of Sunday.

Many men, it seems, like the longer-lasting drug. When Cialis was approved, the pundits predicted it would not sell well because the Viagra brand was so well-established. However, Cialis has proved quite popular, and in head-to-head tests of Viagra vs. Cialis, men and couples have uniformly preferred Cialis because it allows more sexual flexibility.

The main reason not to use Cialis is that it stays in the bloodstream longer than Viagra or Levitra, so any side effects are likely to bother you for longer, too.

Higher Dose, More Side Effects

Viagra comes in 50 and 100 mg pills. The typical dose is 25 to 100 mg. For 25 mg, cut a 50 mg pill in half using a pill cutter available at pharmacies. Higher doses are more likely to cause side effects.

Levitra and Cialis are available in doses of 5, 10, and 20 mg. Larger doses are more likely to cause side effects.

Over Time, Most Men Need More

Over time, many men find they need to increase their dose. University of Alabama researchers tracked 150 men who took Viagra regularly for two years or more. During that period one-third of them had to increase their dose from 50 to 100 mg. The same is presumably true of Levitra and Cialis.

To Boost the Drugs' Effectiveness

For men who respond poorly to erection drugs, it may help to combine the medication with the over-the-counter supplement, ArginMax. ArginMax contains the amino acid L-arginine, a chemical precursor of nitric oxide, plus ginkgo, ginseng, two medicinal herbs that some studies show aid erection. Researchers at

University of California, Davis, worked with men with ED, who did not get much benefit from Viagra. The men took Viagra plus either ArginMax or a placebo. After four weeks, erections improved significantly in 22 percent of those taking the placebo, but among men using ArginMax, the figure was 60 percent.

From ED Treatment to “Erection Insurance”

Viagra was originally approved for a medical problem, persistent ED. The original ads featured elderly Senator Bob Dole talking about how it helped his medical problem.

But once a drug is approved for any reason, doctors are free to prescribe it for other, so-called “off label” uses. Today, all erection medications are most widely used as “erection insurance” by men who don’t have persistent ED, but have the balky, slow-rising, not-so-firm erections typical of the 40 to 60 age group. A recent ad for Viagra features a young, buffed, professional baseball player saying: “I take batting practice. I take fielding practice. I take Viagra.” Ads for Levitra and Cialis are similar, featuring men who appear to be in their 30s or early 40s, and healthy, but just a little concerned about erection reliability.

If you’re concerned about erection reliability, there are several nondrug approaches to raising an erection and keeping it firm: Don’t smoke. Don’t drink any alcohol for a few hours before sex, and don’t drink more than 2 drinks a day. Eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Get seven hours of sleep a night. In other words, live a healthy lifestyle and you’re likely to have a penis that behaves the way you want.

But if you still have balky erection—and this is perfectly natural for men over 45—then you might decide you want to use erection medication for erection insurance. Start with a low dose and take more if necessary

Don’t Buy Erection Drugs Over the Internet

Junk emails offer the erection drugs at huge discounts. There are two reasons not to buy them. You can’t be sure what you’re getting. And in men over 40, erection problems can be the first symptom of diabetes or cardiovascular disease. If you are concerned about your erections, get a checkup.

Yohimbine

For centuries, the bark of the West African yohimbe tree was reputed to restore faltering erections. Scientists scoffed—until the 1980s, when several studies

showed that a chemical in the bark, yohimbine, increases blood flow into the penis. More than 10 years before Viagra, the Food and Drug Administration approved yohimbine as a prescription treatment for erection problems. The herbal extract is available under the brand names Aphrodyne and Yocon.

However, since its approval, yohimbine has been attacked as ineffective. The situation is controversial—and confusing. An analysis of 208 studies published from 1979 through 1994 led the American Urological Association to conclude that yohimbine is no better than a placebo. However, two other analyses—a 1996 review of 16 studies at Syracuse University, and a 1998 British analysis of seven studies—both showed that yohimbine *is* an effective treatment for ED. The British group called it “a reasonable therapeutic option.”

But the naysayers may have a point, at least about the yohimbine products sold over-the-counter in supplement shops and health food stores. In 1995, the FDA analyzed 26 over-the-counter yohimbine products. The yohimbine content of yohimbe bark is 7,089 parts per million (ppm). Concentrations found in the tested products ranged from less than 0.1 ppm to 489 ppm, probably not enough to have much effect. If you want to yohimbine, as your physician for one of the prescription drugs. Recommended dosage ranges from 18 to 100 mg/day.

Possible side effects include: increased heart rate and blood pressure, fluid retention, nervousness, irritability, headache, dizziness, tremor, and flushing.

If you'd like to try Aphrodyne or Yocon, consult your physician.

An Important Note

Erection medication is a boon to men who need it, but the publicity surrounding it reinforces an idea that hurts both men and women sexually. It's the idea sticking an erection into erotic openings is basically all there is to sex. Wrong.

The basis of great sex is leisurely, playful, whole-body sensuality that includes the genitals, but is not fixated on them. For most men over 45 to raise erections, whole-body sensuality—kissing, hugging, massage strokes and fondling all over—are necessary prerequisites. Contrary to the all-genital sex in pornography, truly great sex is a whole-body experience. Without whole-body sensuality, many penises don't become erect—even if the man uses erection medication.

Unfortunately, erection drugs have shone a spotlight on the penis and erection, and have reinforced the false notion that sex is all about erection. If you use erection

medication, incorporate it into lovemaking based on whole-body sensuality. And if you don't, your penis will work best if you let go of porn-style, all-genital sex, and embrace whole-body sensuality.

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