

PATIENT INFORMATION

Diabetes and Sexual Functioning

The importance of Sexual Health in people with Diabetes:

The implications of having Diabetes are often widely discussed with your doctor as well as the importance of safe self-management. What is often minimally discussed, if at all, is the impact that diabetes can have on your sexual health if it is not looked after properly.

People with a diagnosis of diabetes have a higher risk than the general population of encountering problems with sexual functioning as a result of running chronic high blood glucose levels.

High blood glucose levels can lead to nerve damage which affects sex organs by reducing blood flow and hindering 'normal' sexual function.

Problems with Sexual functioning in men with Diabetes:

Nerve damage and circulation issues resulting from the condition can cause men to have difficulties with erection or ejaculation.

- Males may struggle to obtain and maintain an erection. This is often due to hyperglycaemia and **poor control of blood sugar levels** which leads to changes in the blood vessels.
- An inadequate blood supply for an erection can result from the blood vessels becoming too hard and narrow.
- Erectile dysfunction is much more common in males with diabetes than those who don't have the condition.
- Males may also experience retrograde ejaculation which means semen enters the bladder and then comes out of the body in urine, rather than through the penis. This is caused by nerve damage as a result of poor blood glucose control.
- They may also experience a decrease in their sex drive.

Problems with Sexual functioning in women with diabetes:

Nerve damage, reduced blood flow to genitals and hormonal changes are difficulties that can arise due to higher blood glucose levels in women.

- Roughly around a quarter of women with diabetes can be affected by sexual difficulties. This is mostly caused by blood vessels in the vaginal walls becoming harder.
- Women may experience:
 - Vaginal dryness – leading to more pain/discomfort during sex
 - Reduced genital sensation
 - Decreased sex drive
 - Difficulty becoming aroused
 - Inability to reach orgasm
 - Reduced sexual response
- Having high blood sugar levels results in a greatly increased risk of women experiencing yeast infections and urinary tract infections, causing dry/irritant skin, itching, and pain during intercourse. They can also be more difficult to treat.

If problems do arise:

Possible suggestions for men:

For erectile dysfunction:

- Pelvic floor exercises (see <http://www.healthline.com/health/kegel-exercises>) for more information
- Erectile dysfunction medication
- Injections of medications into the penis
- A vacuum pump
- Placing pellets into the urethra
- Surgery

For retrograde ejaculation:

- Medication that strengthens the muscles of the sphincter of the bladder

For psychological factors and stress:

- Counselling can help with worries about performance and relieve emotional issues that interfere with your sex life.

Possible suggestions for women:

For dryness and pain/discomfort during sex:

- Vaginal lubricants

For sexual response:

- Kegel exercises which strengthen the pelvic floor muscles exercises (see <http://www.healthline.com/health/kegel-exercises>) for more information

For psychological factors and stress:

Counselling can help with worries about performance and relieve emotional issues that interfere with your sex life

Preventing problems with sexual functioning in people with diabetes:

The best and most effective way to avoid problems in diabetes-related sexual functioning is by controlling your blood glucose levels and looking after your condition.

It is important to monitor and regulate your blood glucose levels as explained to you by the doctor. Improved diabetes management will improve sexual health.

Speaking to your doctor about your sexual health is important too. Your doctor may discover that the problems are not due to diabetes but because of other factors and therefore they could suggest alternative treatments.

For more information:

- **NINJABETIC – SEX AND DIABETES**
[Ninjabetic – Sex and diabetes - The Diabetes Times](#)
- **Diabetes UK**
[Sex and diabetes | Diabetes UK | Sex, Relationships and Diabetes](#)

Any questions for the team?

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For further assistance or to receive this information in a different format, please contact the department which created this leaflet.

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