

Natural Remedies for Erectile Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction, formerly called impotence, is the inability to obtain an adequate erection for satisfactory sexual activity. It's more common in men over 65, but it can occur at any age.

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Here are five natural remedies that are used for erectile dysfunction.

1) L-Arginine

L-arginine is an amino acid that the body uses to make nitric oxide, a substance signals smooth muscle surrounding blood vessels to relax, which dilates the blood vessels and increases blood flow. Relaxation of smooth muscle in the penis allows for enhanced blood flow, leading to an erection.

L-arginine is found naturally in foods such as meat, dairy, poultry and fish. It is also available as oral L-arginine supplements.

There have only been two studies to date, however, evaluating the effectiveness of L-arginine for erectile dysfunction.

One study involved 50 men who took L-arginine (5 grams a day) or a placebo. After six weeks, significantly more men taking L-arginine experienced an improvement in sexual function compared with men taking the placebo. Interestingly, it only benefited men who had initially low levels of nitric oxide.

Another study using a smaller dose of L-arginine and shorter treatment duration found no benefit with L-arginine use. The study involved 32 men with erectile dysfunction who took oral L-arginine supplements (500 milligrams three times per day) or a placebo for 17 days. Oral L-arginine was no better than the placebo.

Side effects may include digestive complaints. High doses of L-arginine may stimulate the body's production of gastrin, a hormone that increases stomach acid. For this reason, L-arginine may be harmful for individuals with ulcers and people taking drugs that are hard on the stomach.

L-arginine may also alter potassium levels in the body, especially in people with liver disease. It should not be taken by people who are on medications that alter potassium levels, such as potassium sparing diuretics and ACE inhibitors.

2) Propionyl-L-Carnitine

One study examined the use of two forms of carnitine, propionyl-L-carnitine and acetyl-L-carnitine in 96 men who with erectile dysfunction after prostate surgery. One group was given a placebo, another group took propionyl-L-carnitine (2 grams per day) plus acetyl-L-carnitine (2 grams per day) and sildenafil (Viagra) when needed, and the third group used Viagra alone.

Propionyl-L-carnitine and acetyl-L-carnitine were found to enhance the effectiveness of sildenafil, and result in improved erectile function, sexual intercourse satisfaction, orgasm, and general sexual well-being compared to Viagra alone.

Another study examined the effectiveness of propionyl-L-carnitine supplements plus sildenafil in men with erectile dysfunction and diabetes who were previously unresponsive to Viagra alone.

Participants in the study received propionyl-L-carnitine (two grams per day) plus Viagra (50 milligrams twice a week) or Viagra alone. After 24 weeks, propionyl-L-carnitine plus Viagra was significantly more effective than Viagra alone.

3) Gingko

The herb ginkgo is used for erectile dysfunction, particularly in people who experience sexual dysfunction as a side effect of antidepressant drugs. It appears to relax smooth muscle and enhance blood flow in the penis.

In one study of 60 men with erectile dysfunction, there was a 50 percent success rate after six months of ginkgo treatment. Two additional studies, however, found that ginkgo was no better than a placebo.

4) Zinc

Significant depletion of the mineral zinc, associated with long-term use of diuretics, diabetes, digestive disorders, and certain kidney and liver diseases, has been shown to lead to erectile dysfunction.

5) Ashwagandha

The herb Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*) is sometimes called Indian Ginseng because it is thought to have similar effects on the body. It is thought to increase energy, stamina, and sexual function. No studies, however, have examined whether it is effective for erectile dysfunction in humans.

Yohimbe (Not Recommended)

The bark of the West African yohimbe tree is a source of yohimbine, a compound that has been found to stimulate blood flow to the penis, increase libido, and decrease the period between ejaculations.

Yohimbe is not recommended, however, because it is potentially dangerous, even in small doses. Side effects may include dizziness, anxiety, and nausea, a severe drop in blood pressure, abdominal pain, fatigue, hallucinations, and paralysis.