

**TIME TO
RAISE IT**

Developed and funded by Upjohn

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FOREWORD



MARTIN TOD
MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

An estimated 5 million men in the UK experience erection problems (EPs) and it is not just affecting older men, but those in their 20s-30s.^{i,ii}

Despite this, there's little research in the public domain about the current incidence levels of EPs. This report, one of the largest of its kind on intimacy, seeks to change that, bringing to light the reality of EPs and encouraging men and their partners to take the first steps towards finding a solution together.

On the surface the reality of EPs for many men is bleak. Not only can EPs be a sign of underlying conditions which if left unchecked can cause further problems such as heart disease and diabetes,ⁱⁱⁱ but the sense of failure and perceived loss of masculinity that many men feel as a result of EPs can also cause them to retreat from themselves, their partners and life.ⁱⁱ EPs can have a negative impact on men's self-esteem, which if left unspoken can have a big impact on their

mental health causing depression and anxiety.ⁱⁱ And men are not the only ones left feeling isolated, anxious or under pressure. Partners can assume the worst: "he's having an affair," "he doesn't love me anymore," or "he has a chronic health illness."ⁱⁱ For too many men, EPs are unnecessarily damaging self-esteem, relationships, sex, love and intimacy.

But this doesn't have to be the case. Our research has found that simply talking openly about the issue – with a partner, a friend or a healthcare professional – can help to relieve the burden that so many men and their partners feel.ⁱⁱ That's exactly why we're supporting the launch of the Time to Raise It movement to reduce the shame and stigma associated with erection problems and put the joy back into sex.

At a time when intimacy is being threatened more than ever before it is now time to speak up, and break this never-ending cycle of silence around EPs, so that men and their partners can work together to find a solution and enjoy their sex lives once more.

To find out more on how you can get involved, please visit the Time to Raise It Facebook page: www.facebook.com/timetoraiseit

Simply talking openly about EPs can help to relieve the burden.

METHODOLOGY

We commissioned one of our biggest surveys on intimacy to uncover attitudes to sex and relationships and the barriers getting in the way of our love lives.

The research was conducted by Opinium among a nationally representative sample of 5,007 UK adults, from a consumer panel, and then weighted in line with ONS figures on gender, age, region, working status and social grade.

A range of relationship, sexual, mental and physical health experts and organisations have contributed to this study and are founding partners of Time to Raise It.



A close-up photograph of a man and a woman in a romantic embrace. The woman is in the foreground, her face in profile, looking down with a soft expression. The man is behind her, his ear and part of his face visible. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue and purple gradient. The text "THE STATE OF INTIMACY TODAY" is centered in white, uppercase letters.

THE STATE OF INTIMACY TODAY

HOW OFTEN ARE WE REALLY DOING IT?

Intimacy is an important part of any relationship – allowing couples to connect with one another on a physical and emotional level. But when it comes to talking about sex, Brits tend to be relatively silent about what goes on between the sheets which can create unrealistic expectations about what are ‘normal’ levels of intimacy.^{iv}

So, how often are we actually having sex?

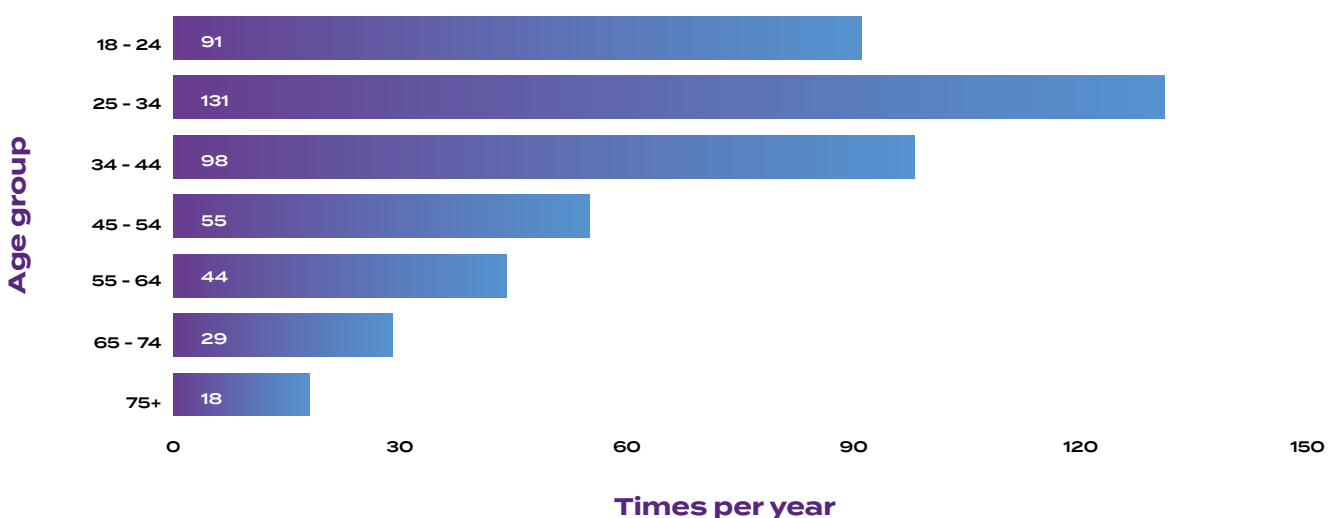
Brits are sexually active around six times a month, that’s 73 times a year.ⁱⁱ Millennials (25 – 34-year olds) who have grown up with fairly liberal attitudes around sex are having it the most - averaging

around 131 times a year, while Gen Z (18 – 24-year olds), are intimate on average 91 times a year.ⁱⁱ

But no matter how much sex we are having, **we are looking for greater intimacy in our love lives.ⁱⁱ Over two fifths of us (46%) would like to be more intimate.ⁱⁱ** Surprisingly, Gen Z (18 – 24 year olds) are craving greater intimacy more than any other age group (59%), but it is also still deemed important to those who are 75+ (32%).ⁱⁱ

Over two – fifths of us (46%) would like to be more intimate.ⁱⁱ

HOW OFTEN IS EACH AGE GROUP INTIMATE? ⁱⁱ



WHY DO WE CRAVE INTIMACY?

The importance of intimacy goes beyond the physical for most people. It can benefit almost every part of a relationship in particular:ⁱⁱ



Said it makes them feel more loved



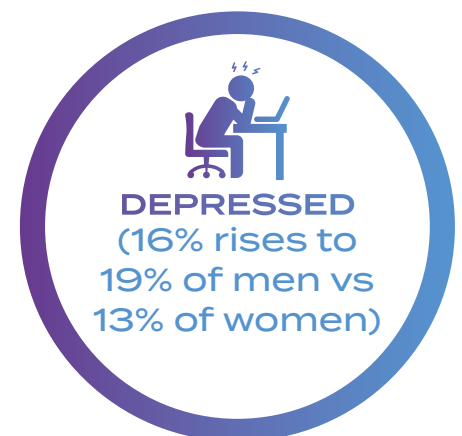
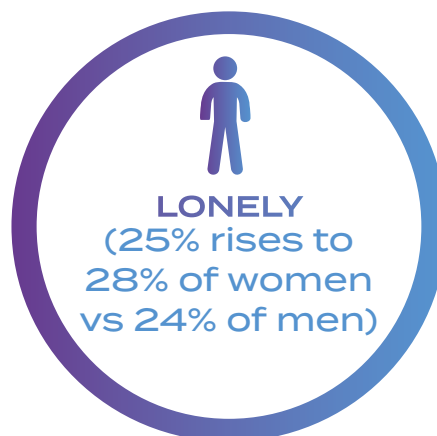
Said sharing physical intimacy makes them feel happier and more stable in their relationship



Reported regular intimacy leads to better communication with their partner

IMPROVING SELF – ESTEEM

Not being regularly intimate causes people to feelⁱⁱ





BUSY LIFESTYLES, PHYSICAL
HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH
ISSUES ARE STOPPING
US GETTING CLOSER

PICTURE THE SCENE

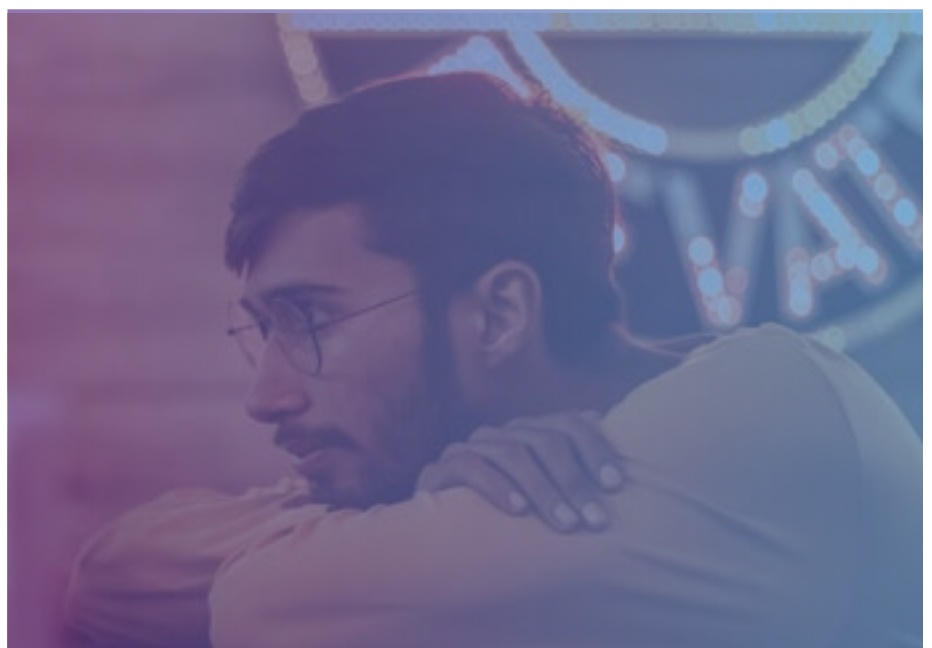
You're in bed with your partner. You're feeling in the mood to be intimate, but you just need to finish that last bit of work/the baby is crying/you're exhausted from a long week – so inevitably you end up playing on your phone rather than playing with your partner.

Busy lifestyles lead the way (28%) as the top barrier getting in the way of our love lives followed by mental health issues such as stress and depression (24%).ⁱⁱ It's not a surprise that factors such as stress are impacting our ability to be intimate with loved ones. Research has shown that when our mood is low, or we're feeling stressed, we can find it difficult to enjoy things that we normally enjoy – one of which is sex.^v

People who are depressed also have decreased energy and suffer from low self-esteem – all of which can impact sex drive.^v Sexual issues such as erection problems (EPs) are also playing a role in our intimacy levels with almost a fifth (16%) saying this has prevented us from being intimate with a partner.ⁱⁱ And with a lack of intimacy causing low self-esteem and stress – this cycle of intimacy discontent goes on.

With physical connection threatened more than ever before – it's highly important that we find time to connect with partners, as doing nothing can have a negative impact. 33% of those in a relationship said if their intimacy issues cannot be overcome it could lead to a breakdown in the relationship.ⁱⁱ That's exactly why we wanted to launch the **Time to Raise It** movement – to put the joy back into sex.

People who are depressed also have decreased energy and suffer from low self-esteem.^v



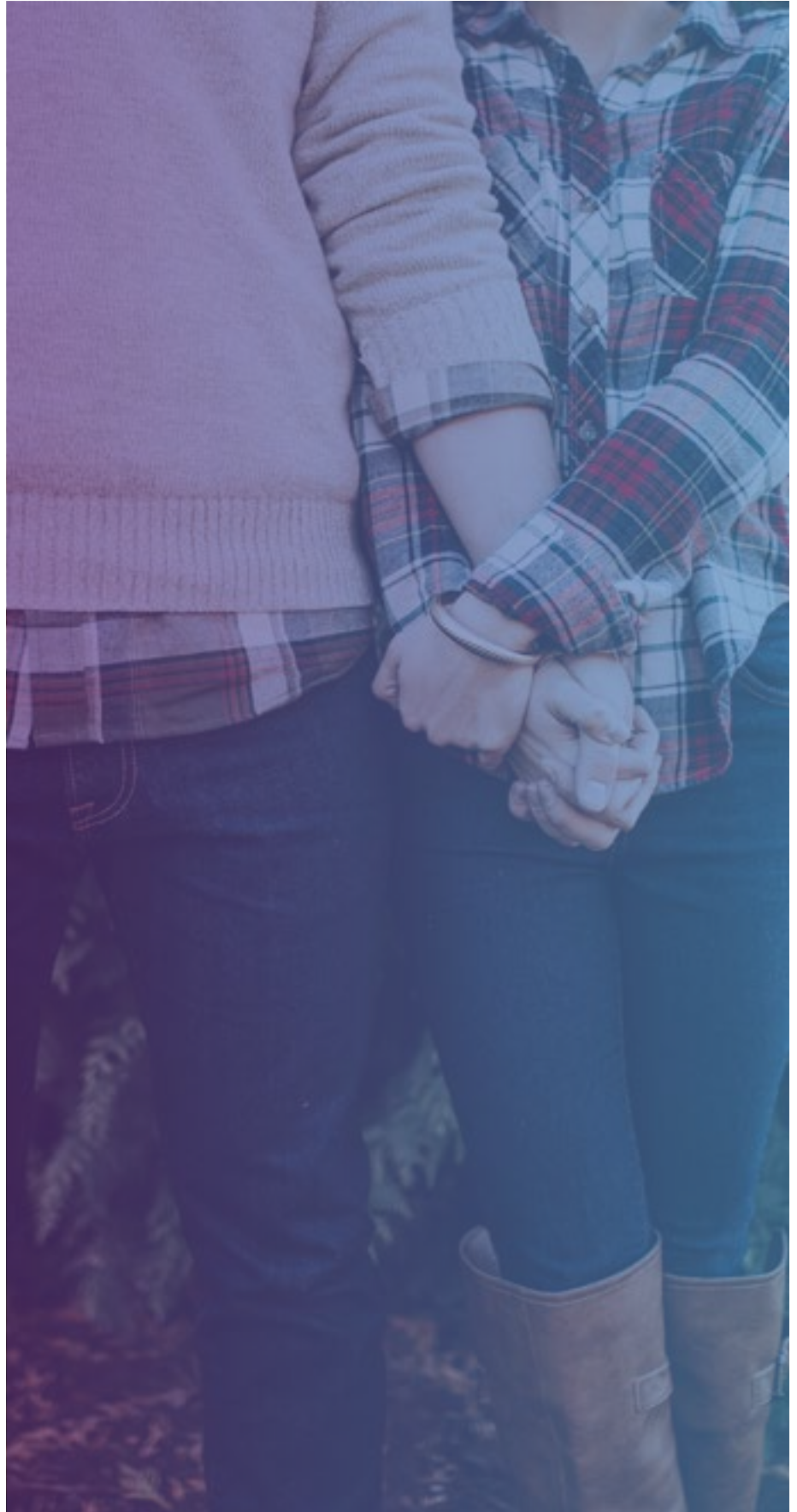
THE PRESSURE TO PERFORM

It's clear that, as a nation, we're craving more intimacy but there is a distinct lack of conversation about it, which may be exacerbated by not seeing realistic representations of sex and relationships in the media or on social media.ⁱⁱ

Over a quarter (28%) of us feel pressure to have a perfect relationship.ⁱⁱ

Rather than talking about all aspects of our relationships, we share the cookie cutter moments – with no real indication of what is truly going on behind closed doors. And this picture-perfect representation is causing over a quarter (28%) of us to feel pressure to have a perfect relationship in real life because we never see other people talking about their problems on social media .ⁱⁱ

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THE PRESSURE TO PERFORM

“We’re surrounded by messages that tell us sex is essential for a successful relationship. But this can create the perception that if you’re not having sex all of the time, or something is preventing you from having the type of sex you see in the media you’re somehow failing. It’s so important for us to breakdown these perceptions of sex and relationships. Focussing so intensely on just one approach to sex can create needless pressure, anxiety and shame, and ignores the many different ways there are to bring yourself and others pleasure.”





NOT GETTING IT UP IS
GETTING PEOPLE DOWN

NOT GETTING IT UP IS GETTING PEOPLE DOWN

Not being able to get or maintain an erection is a major factor for many couples, with an estimated 5 million men in the UK having experienced the issue.ⁱ

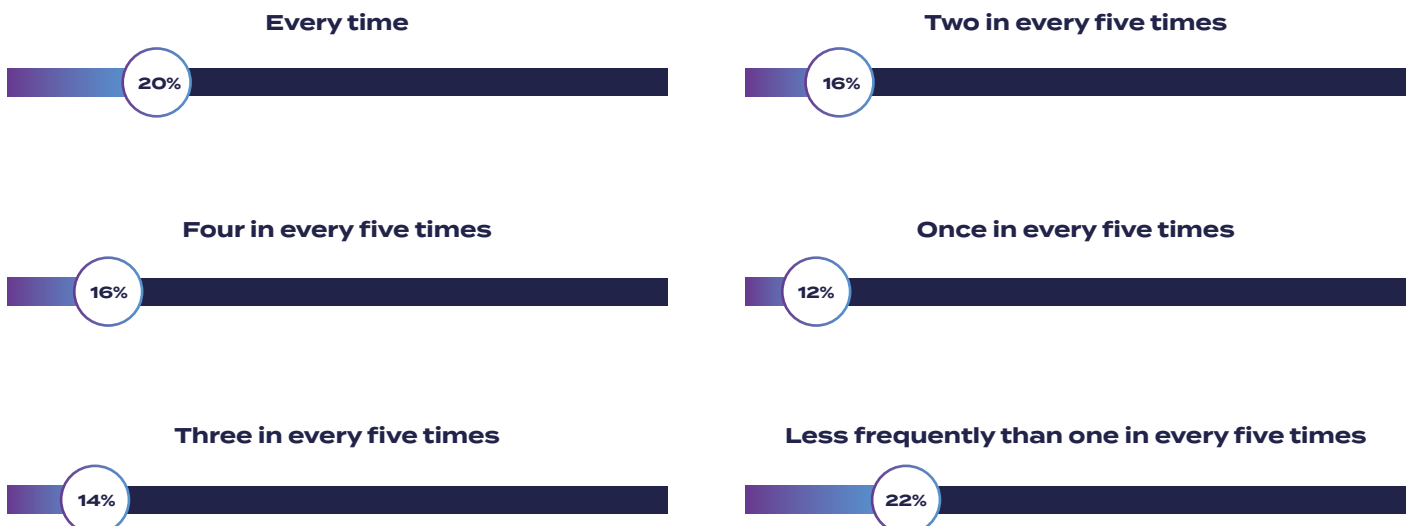
Over a quarter of Brits (26%) said EPs have prevented them from being intimate with a partner.ⁱⁱ And despite popular opinion, younger British men aren't exempt – a quarter (25%) are under the age of 35 and in their so-called 'sexual prime.'ⁱⁱ

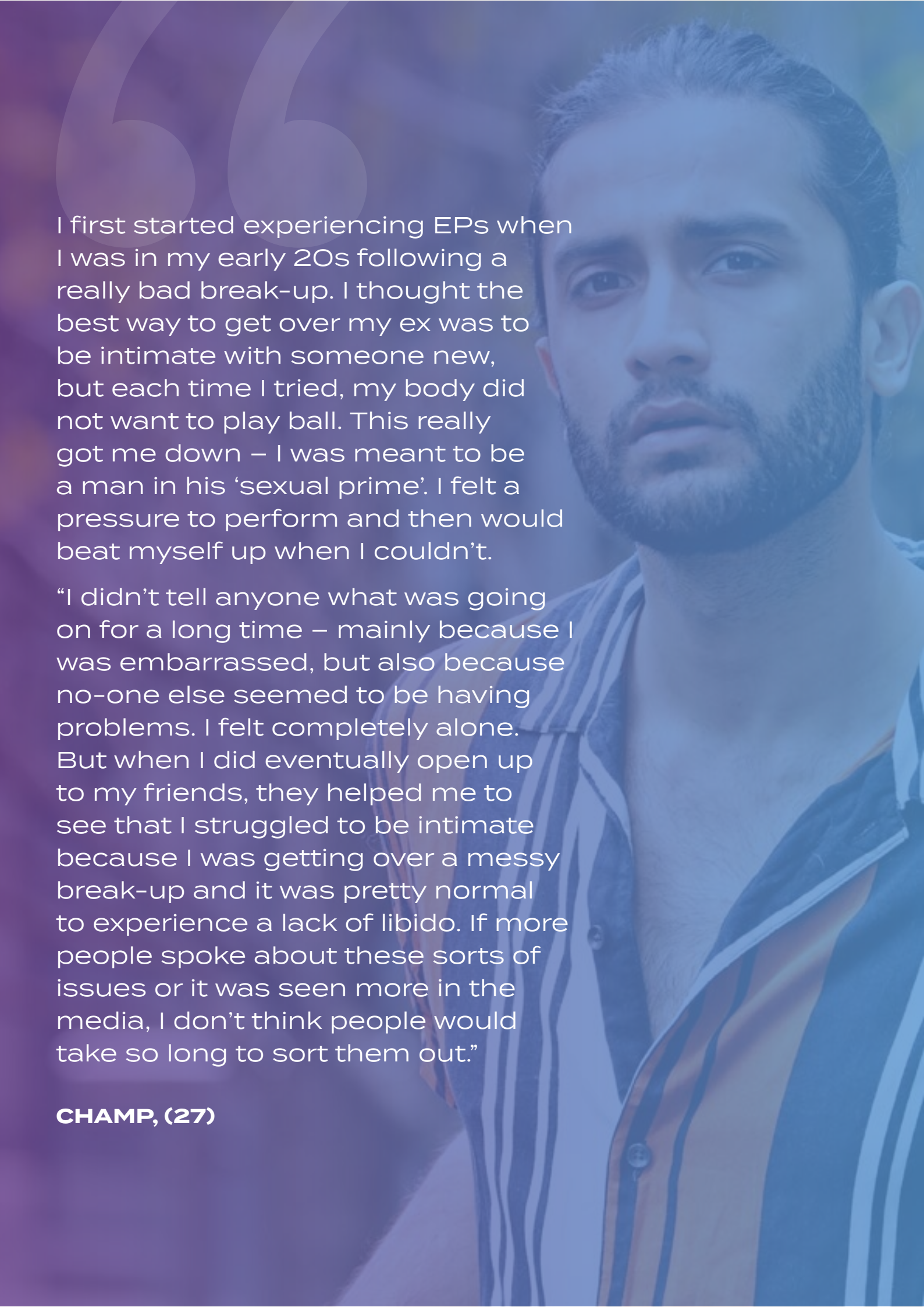
EPs are about more than just sex. They're having a negative impact on men's self-esteem, causing a third (31%) to feel 'inadequate' and

over a quarter (27%) to feel like a 'failure'.ⁱⁱ Even more worryingly, they're also affecting men's mental health leading to feelings of anxiety (27%) depression (19%) and lack of confidence (23%).ⁱⁱ Partners are greatly affected too – more than one in ten (13%) blame themselves, 20% feel unattractive and 8% have believed an affair must be causing their own relationship's lack of intimacy.ⁱⁱ

Over a quarter of Brits (26%) said EPs have prevented them from being intimate with a partner.ⁱⁱ

HOW OFTEN ARE MEN EXPERIENCE EPs? ⁱⁱ





I first started experiencing EPs when I was in my early 20s following a really bad break-up. I thought the best way to get over my ex was to be intimate with someone new, but each time I tried, my body did not want to play ball. This really got me down – I was meant to be a man in his ‘sexual prime’. I felt a pressure to perform and then would beat myself up when I couldn’t.

“I didn’t tell anyone what was going on for a long time – mainly because I was embarrassed, but also because no-one else seemed to be having problems. I felt completely alone. But when I did eventually open up to my friends, they helped me to see that I struggled to be intimate because I was getting over a messy break-up and it was pretty normal to experience a lack of libido. If more people spoke about these sorts of issues or it was seen more in the media, I don’t think people would take so long to sort them out.”

CHAMP, (27)

THE IMPACT OF EPs ON MENTAL HEALTH

"As well as being a sign of underlying health conditions, it's clear that EPs are having a profound impact on many men's mental health, which if left unspoken can be really damaging. With men less likely than women to disclose mental health problems to loved ones, it is now more important than ever for us to take EPs seriously and start talking about the issue, so people do not have to unnecessarily experience it in silence."



MARTIN TOD
MEN'S HEALTH FORUM

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THE ERECTION GAP



SARAH LOUISE RYAN DATING AND RELATIONSHIP EXPERT

"The myth that men are always 'raring to go' is extremely problematic, particularly when viewed in the lens of erection problems. This viewpoint creates the perception that to not be able to get an erection means you are less of a man, which ultimately is causing men to remain silent on the issue. This is exactly the type of rhetoric that the Time to Raise It Movement is looking to challenge – so men and their partners feel as though they can open up about the issue and seek help."


And why are erection problems still shrouded in silence? Plain and simple, a lot of men (31%) are embarrassed to talk about it.ⁱⁱ As a nation, we've made great strides in confronting uncomfortable subjects like female incontinence and the menopause, in a bid to normalise them and help people open up. But we're not quite there yet when it comes to erections, which means nearly a third (27%) of those experiencing them, haven't spoken to anyone and less than half (46%) have opened up to their partner. ⁱⁱ

Men are still very much internalising the issue with 31% admitting that worrying about not being able to get an erection adds to the problem, further perpetuating a cycle of anxiety and inaction.ⁱⁱ

This wall of silence, built on embarrassment, is creating an 'erection gap.' That is the amount of time some men take to address the issue once they've noticed it. At worst, this can be up to 2 years, and in that time, there could be wider mental and physical health challenges that are going unchecked.ⁱⁱ That's why it's so important to talk openly about the issue either with a someone

close to you, or to a HCP such as a pharmacist who can give tailored lifestyle advice, do a general health check or discuss the treatment options available.

Now is the time for us to breakdown any unnecessary shame and stigma surrounding EPs and partners are great first port of call. Those who have spoken to their partners have had positive outcomes, feeling reassured and supported.ⁱⁱ Likewise, partners felt, after speaking about the issue, they could tackle it together (29%) and understand that it's not their fault (23%).ⁱⁱ



“I personally found it refreshing when my fiancé Phill first spoke to me about his erection problems. I had been in several relationships where the guy would rather make up excuses to avoid being intimate than admit they couldn’t get an erection.

When Phill spoke to me, EPs became a manageable part of our life and we tackled them together. Five years down the line we are doing better than ever. I would definitely encourage anyone else experiencing this issue to talk to their partner about it. It’s nothing to be ashamed of as so many people go through it, and it’s only through talking that we can remove the shame surrounding it.”

LAURA, (31)

CAUSES OF ERECTION PROBLEMS

More awareness is needed about erection problems to get men and their partners talking - 75% want to know more about the lifestyle causes of EPs and 72% agree that we need to speak more openly about EPs.ⁱⁱ

EPs CAN BE CAUSED BY A RANGE OF FACTORS INCLUDING:^{vi}

PHYSICAL REASONS



Cardiovascular issues



High blood pressure



High cholesterol



Diabetes



Obesity

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND LIFESTYLE CAUSES



Stress



Depression



Lack of sleep



Low self-esteem



Performance anxiety



Drinking too much

A romantic couple is shown in profile, about to kiss. The man on the left has a beard and is wearing a denim shirt. The woman on the right has long dark hair and is wearing a white lace top. The image is overlaid with a blue and purple gradient.

THE ONLY WAY IS UP

THE ONLY WAY IS UP

Now is the time to bring the joy back into sex and get couples feeling connected again. Time to Raise It is a movement to normalise EPs with three specific aims:

1

CHALLENGE the lack of honest and open representation when it comes to the reality of sex, love, erection problems and intimacy today.

2

REMOVE the sense of isolation attached to EPs for men and their partners through honest conversation and sharing about the prevalence and causes, including health factors of EPs.

3

RECONNECT men and their partners to each other and to sex through open education, cultural references and media conversations.

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

1

Like our Facebook page and share your stories using #Timetoraiseit: www.facebook.com/timetoraiseit

2

Follow our partners' social media channels which are detailed on the next page.

3

TALK: One step we can all take to normalise EPs and intimacy issues is to TALK – to partners, to friends, to healthcare professionals who are well-equipped to offer lifestyle advice and potential treatment options.

USEFUL LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION

TIME TO RAISE IT FACEBOOK PAGE

[www.facebook.com/
timetoraiseitEPs](https://www.facebook.com/timetoraiseitEPs)

NHS: [https://www.
nhs.uk/conditions/
erection-problems-
erectile-dysfunction/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/erection-problems-erectile-dysfunction/)

**Men's Health
Forum:** [https://www.
menshealthforum.org.uk/](https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/)

SEXUAL HEALTH ADVICE

Brook: [https://www.
brook.org.uk/](https://www.brook.org.uk/)

**Sexual Advice
Association:** [https://
sexualadviceassociation.
co.uk/](https://sexualadviceassociation.co.uk/)

RELATIONSHIP OR DATING ADVICE:

Sarah Louise Ryan:
www.sarahlouiseryan.com

FOUNDING PARTNERS OF THE TIME TO RAISE IT MOVEMENT:



SARAH LOUISE RYAN

REFERENCES

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