



IS NOT HAVING SEX...

THE ELEPHANT IN YOUR BEDROOM?

Here's how to get things
out in the open



Tracey Cox's advice and
guidance for couples who
want to get the elephant
out of the bedroom



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About the author, Tracey Cox

Tracey Cox is an international sex, body language and relationships expert as well as a TV presenter. She is well-known for her TV shows on sex and relationships as well as her range of best-selling books which have sold millions world-wide.

She has an academic background in psychology and travels the world, doing television, radio and print interviews on her specialist subjects.

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The opinions within this Guide are those of Tracey Cox. This is not a medically validated tool.

According to a Global survey conducted by Lilly amongst 1,513 men and women*, the majority of men and women (77%) say the enjoyment of their relationship is limited by ED (erectile dysfunction) and BPH (benign prostatic hyperplasia).¹

** All respondents stated that they (for men) or their partner (for women) experience ED and at least one of the symptoms of BPH.*

WHAT IS ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION (ED) AND BPH?

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is a condition where a man's penis doesn't fill enough with blood to achieve or sustain an erection that's hard enough for intercourse.

Benign prostatic hyperplasia (BPH) is a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate gland that can also cause symptoms such as needing to urinate more frequently and difficulty starting to pass water.²

- ED problems affect over half of all men between 50 and 70 years of age.³
- Approximately 40% of men over the age of 50 years suffer from moderate to severe lower urinary tract symptoms (LUTS)⁴, the commonest cause of which in this age-group is BPH.⁵
- ED and BPH also affect younger men⁶ and may share a common underlying cause.⁷

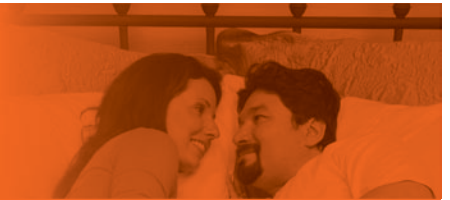
The focus of this guide is ED, since it is ED that is the more likely cause of problems in the bedroom. I hope that it will help affected couples talk with their partner and work together to solve the issue to have a happy sex life.

HOW ED CAN AFFECT YOUR RELATIONSHIP

- Many men feel traumatised by ED. The ability to get and maintain an erection is important for a man's self-esteem and relationship.
- ED can cause couples to avoid sex. More than 80% of men and 60% of women up to age of 80 consider sex an important part of their lives.⁸
- Ignoring ED doesn't just affect your sex life; it can affect your health because it can also be the first symptom of previously undiagnosed conditions, such as cardiovascular disease.⁹
- If there is an underlying medical condition, then talking about it and getting treatment early can help the ED.



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WHY COUPLES DON'T TALK ABOUT ED

- When things don't go the way we expect sexually and he can't get an erection, the brain notices immediately. The next time there's a hint of intimacy - even a hug - it says to both partners, 'Hold on. Last time you did this, it didn't go very well'. One or both of you tense up or back off, leaving you both feeling anxious and rejected.
- When couples stop having regular sex, they'll often adopt the 'ostrich' approach - stick their head in the sand and hope the problem goes away. But the longer you go without sex, the bigger deal it becomes and the harder it is to talk about. It becomes the 'elephant in the room' and the relationship suffers.
- Women don't want to talk about ED because they're worried they'll upset their partners, embarrass them - or that they might be the problem. They're not attractive or 'sexy' enough or their husband doesn't love them anymore.

Don't panic. ED is common and 'normal', solutions are out there. There's no need to be embarrassed. Talking about ED is the first step to getting the right treatment and solving the issue in most cases.

TALKING ABOUT ED TOGETHER

It can be terrifying talking about sex issues. The good news is, once you get past those first few awkward minutes, most couples find it's much easier than they thought - and an incredible relief to finally get it out in the open.

GOOD CONVERSATION TIPS FOR BOTH OF YOU

- **Bring up the subject** by simply saying, 'Have you noticed we're not having sex as much lately? I miss it. Why do you think that is? Shall we have a chat about it?'
- **Choose a time** when you're both getting on well and in a place where you most comfortably chat. It might be over a drink at the end of the day or while cooking dinner together. Try to make sure there are no interruptions.
- **Take turns to speak.** If you know you're going to be given time to explain your points, you'll listen to theirs more carefully. Most of us spend the time our partner talks planning what we're going to say next.
- **Speak calmly and clearly.** Don't talk too fast and stop between points to make sure your partner has time to process their thoughts.
- **Watch your body language.** Sit close enough to touch. Make eye contact and don't cross your arms or legs. If you feel your partner getting tense, hug them and tell them how much you love them.
- **Get them to repeat back what it is they think you've said** once you've finished talking. This makes you feel heard and ensures they haven't misunderstood you.
- **Talk about your feelings,** and then move on to talking about how you'd both like to resolve the issue, finally deciding on a course of action. (See What do we do now?)
- **Finish the conversation with a hug** or by doing something nice together. You'll both feel vulnerable but relieved that the elephant in the room has finally been acknowledged.

You'll find tips for each of you on the next page.

ONE WAY OF TALKING ABOUT ED IF YOU'RE THE MAN

- **Put yourself in your partner's shoes.** She's nervous to talk to you about ED because she doesn't want to embarrass or offend you. She may also be worried it means you don't fancy her, you're having an affair or have fallen out of love. Start by reassuring her none of this is true.
- **Tell her you'd like to talk about your sex life** and why you've been either having troubles getting an erection or avoiding sex. Start by reassuring her (see above) and then say you think you might have ED.
- **Have this leaflet with you** when you talk to your partner and read it together. It will help guide the conversation and course of action.
- **Tell her how it feels physically and emotionally.** It's not 'unmanly' to admit to feelings like embarrassment or shame and will help her to understand.
- **If you feel uncomfortable talking about emotions,** outline the problem and how it makes you feel quickly, then focus on solutions.
- **Your reward for a few minutes of awkwardness?** Talking about it honestly and openly will be a tremendous relief. You no longer have to avoid affection or sex. You can be honest and solve this together. Your partner will feel reassured and you'll both feel closer. Once you've talked about it, it's a problem that's easily fixed.



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ONE WAY OF TALKING ABOUT ED IF YOU'RE THE PARTNER

- **See it from his side:** ED can be devastating for men. It makes him feel less 'manly' and his self-esteem plummets. If he's not very good at expressing emotion, sex is often how he expressed love for you. He may be worried you'll stop loving him, find sex elsewhere or are laughing at him behind his back. The more anxious he feels, the worse the problem gets.
- **Write down what you'd like to say, so you can word it properly.** Use 'I' not 'You' when you do. ('I worry you don't find me attractive when you don't want sex' rather than, 'You make me feel unattractive when you don't want sex'). Say it out loud solo. How would you react if you heard that? Is it sensitively and tactfully worded?
- **Tell him you love him, miss sex with him and want to talk about why you're both not having it anymore.** He may react angrily or defensively but stay calm. Tell him you don't automatically feel like sex all the time and perhaps it's the same for him? Tell him you read that erection problems affect at least one in every ten men⁹ and ask if that's happening to him and that's why he's avoiding sex.
- **Constantly reassure him that it happens to everyone, is normal and fixable.** Let him know you don't need him to get an erection to enjoy sex, to take the pressure off. But encourage him to see his doctor because it can mean other health issues. Offer to go with him.

- **Focus on solutions, rather than the problem.** Read this leaflet through together with him and use it as a talking point.
- **If he refuses to talk, drop it and say, 'I'm here if you'd like to talk to me later.'** Try again in a few days. Encourage even small attempts from him to open up. Nearly all men say they feel so much better once they've talked with their partners and ready to find a solution.



WHAT DO WE DO NOW? ONCE YOU'VE TALKED ABOUT ED

- **Go to the doctor** for a full health check and for advice. There's no need to be embarrassed - GPs talk about ED to patients every day.
- **Your GP will outline various methods of treating ED.** These include 'talking' therapy, prescription drugs and other methods, depending on whether the cause is physical, psychological or both.
- **Decide together which treatment would suit you best,** and then take the appropriate steps to put it all into action.
- **Keep talking and reassuring each other,** every step of the way.

WHEN YOU START HAVING SEX AGAIN

- Don't expect miracles. It can take time before you'll start to see an effect of whatever method you've chosen to treat ED.
- It's always best to tell your partner you've taken any prescribed treatments in case you have side effects and so they can also mentally prepare for sex, especially if you haven't had sex in a while.
- Revisit your doctor every few months to revise how things are going.

The Men's Health Forum charity provides an independent and authoritative voice for male health in England and Wales challenging the issues and inequalities affecting the health and well-being of men and boys.

Our vision is a future in which all boys and men in England and Wales have an equal opportunity to attain the highest possible level of health and well-being.

More information and advice relating to specific men's health issues can be found on the Men's Health Forum website: www.malehealth.co.uk

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