

THE HARD FACTS

about erectile dysfunction and counterfeit drugs

Produced in partnership by: The Brunswick Centre, The Centre for HIV & Sexual Health, and Yorkshire MESMAC with thanks to Andrew Yates, Psychosexual Psychotherapist, Yorkshire Psychosexual Therapies

Men who struggle getting an erection (hard on) often experience emotional distress, which can lead them to avoid intimacy and be reluctant to start new relationships because of the fear of not being able to perform sexually.

Many men don't see erection problems as a real health issue and may feel embarrassed about seeking advice and support from their GP or other health professional. There can be a number of factors involved which cause men erection problems. These can include:

- Age
- Smoking
- Sedentary lifestyle (i.e. irregular exercise, poor diet)
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Diabetes
- Being overweight
- Depression

However, large numbers of men experience erection problems because of psychosocial and relationship problems rather than the above factors.

The introduction of drugs such as Viagra, Levitra and Cialis that help men get and keep an erection has led many to see them as the answer to their problems. This may be the case, but not always as it may be treating the symptom (i.e. not getting an erection) and not any of the underlying health issues or psychological problems.

The internet has made the availability of erection medications easy and discreet. The embarrassment many men feel often drives them to access medications through the internet.

Evidence suggests that the vast majority of erection medications available on the internet are fake. The websites can look really professional and it's hard to tell the fake drug from the real one.

It's no surprise then that people are led to believe they are purchasing the real thing!

Studies have shown that these fake drugs contain little or none of the active ingredients to treat erection problems and have other ingredients that are useless and can be harmful, including:

- Caffeine
- Bulk lactose
- Printer ink
- Metronidazole (antibiotic)
- Glyburide (type 2 diabetes drug)
- Amphetamines
- Talcum powder
- Paracetamol
- Clomiphene (drug to treat gynaecological problems)
- Chloramphenicol (antibiotic)
- Dipyroxone (pain killer)
- Fluoxetine (antidepressant)
- Yohimbine (non-proven herbal preparation to treat erection problems)
- Quinine (anti-malaria drug)
- Gamma-Aminobutyric Acid (non-essential amino acid that is responsible for regulating brain activity)
- Warfarin (rat poison)

If you purchase erection medications over the internet you cannot be sure of what you are taking. There is also the possibility that the fake drugs will interact dangerously with other medication you may be taking. When the fake drugs don't work you may be led to believe that your problem is more serious than it really is. This can make you feel worse about yourself, which could result in any erection problems being greater still.

In addition, you may be paying for fake drugs which, at best, don't work and providing your personal details and credit card information on an internet site that may be insecure, which could put you at risk of fraud and identity theft.

If you think you have bought fake drugs over the internet, the best advice would be not to use them and to throw them away. You could also make a report to The Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency by e-mailing counterfeit@mhra.gsi.gov.uk or tel: 020 3080 6701 (24 hr). For more information visit: www.mhra.gov.uk/buy-medicines-online

For further information:

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The risks of taking erection medication purchased over the internet include:

Direct Risks

- Consuming medication without knowing the ingredients and what they may do, with unknown side effects which may even lead to death
- Variable dose which could lead to overdosing
- Loss of confidence in medication if it doesn't work
- Psychological treatment resistance due to fake erection drugs 'failing' to work
- Identify fraud and financial abuse of credit card details when ordering from unsecured internet sites (sites that do not have a VeriSign Trust Seal or ISIS logo)

Indirect Risks:

- Increased risk of using fake medication when ordering over the internet
- Missed opportunity to have a health screen which may identify the cause of the erectile problem
- Increased risk of undiagnosed medical problems such as cardio-vascular disease, diabetes, obesity, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, Dyslipidemia (abnormal cholesterol levels)
- Interaction with other prescribed medication and recreational drugs including nitrates (poppers)

Although we recommend that anyone experiencing erectile dysfunction issues first seeks consultation with their GP to check any underlying or contributory health problem, we recognise that this may be difficult for some men to do. Options for obtaining erection medications include:

Your GP

GPs can give private prescriptions for men experiencing erection problems who do not qualify for these treatments on the NHS. There will be a cost for the prescription in the region of £40 and there may be an additional dispensing charge at the pharmacy, so it is wise to check this before handing over your prescription for dispensing.

Psychosexual Counselling Services

Either private psychosexual counselling or psychosexual counselling services in your local area (see agencies listed under 'Further Information'). The benefit of using psychosexual counselling is that the cause of the erection problem will be diagnosed and appropriate treatment offered. This may include prescribing erection medication along with psychosexual counselling and/or treatment if there are other medical conditions.

Some High Street Pharmacies

Some of the major high street pharmacies (chemists) also offer an 'over-the counter' service for the sale of erectile dysfunction drugs. They should offer you a consultation before selling these drugs and may also ask for your agreement to inform your GP.

Some of the larger pharmacy companies also offer an internet based ordering system for the drugs with on-line consultation prior to sale - but you need to make absolutely sure it is a trusted and legitimate company. These companies have websites that you can either:

- Use a prescription from your GP to order the drugs and have them delivered to your home
- Provide access to an on-line UK registered doctor who can provide medical care/prescriptions without the need to see a doctor face-to-face.