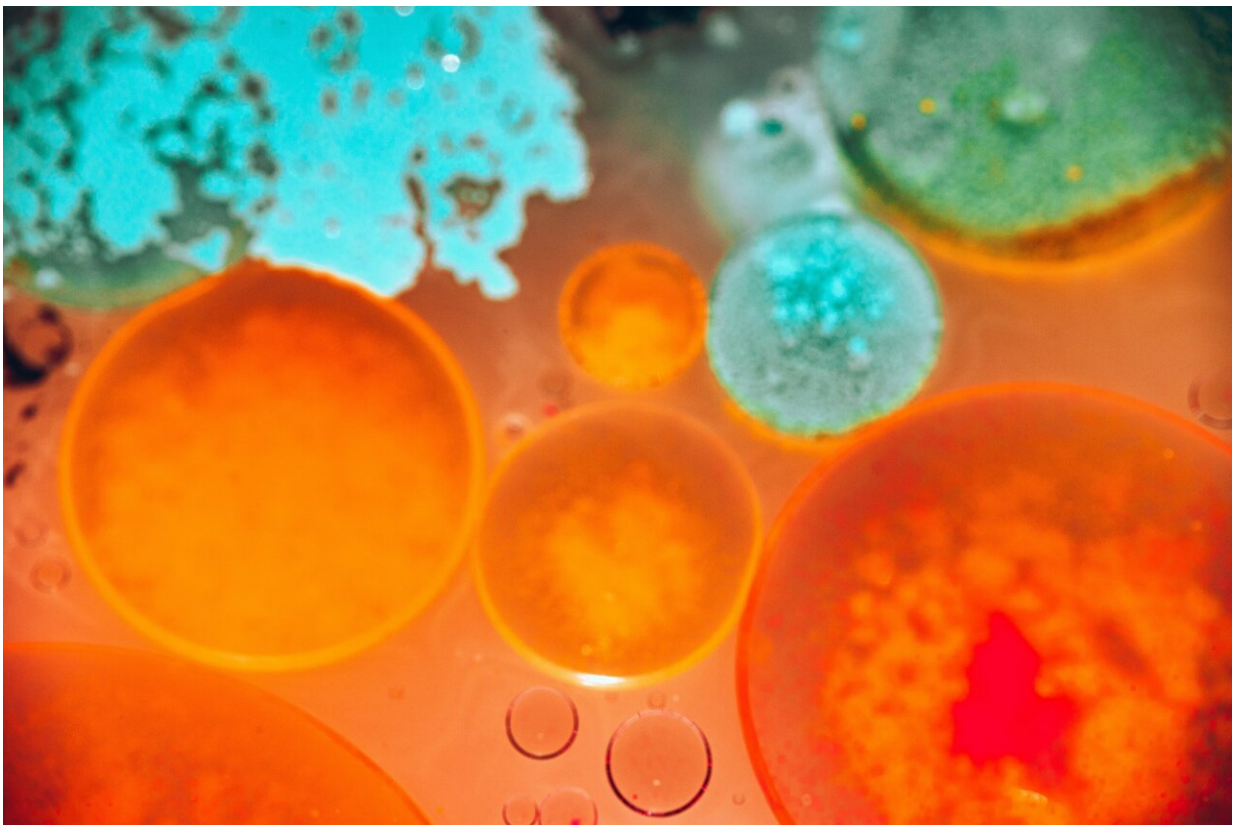


Anxiety can lead to erection problems in young men—but reaching for Viagra isn't always the solution

November 17 2022, by Chantal Gautier



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Many people think of erection problems as a condition that only affects older men. But you don't have to look far to find reports of the condition

among men in [their 20s and 30s](#). Some research even estimates that half of males who report having difficulties getting or maintaining an erection are [in their 30s](#).

Yet despite how common erection problems may be—[affecting nearly half of men aged 18-60](#)—there remains a lot of stigma and shame around having the condition. This can be especially true when you're young, thanks to the [sexual scripts](#) many have grown up hearing—such as that they should always be ready to have sex, that they should get aroused at the drop of a hat, and that they should be able to perform perfectly every time.

As a result, many won't seek help, or will try to fix it using "solutions" that really only mask their problem. For example, there are reports that many [younger men](#) are turning to prescription and over-the-counter drugs, [such as Viagra](#), to cope.

Such drugs have become much cheaper and [more widely available](#) through discreet online pharmacies in recent years. But though these products may help people with the occasional unreliable erection, they won't actually fix the crux of the problem.

There are a number of reasons why erection problems may happen, including [certain health problems](#) (such as hormonal imbalances or [high blood pressure](#)). But one of the most common causes of erection problems, particularly among young men, is [anxiety](#).

Ordinarily, when aroused, the brain sends signals to the penis and triggers it to fill with blood. But when a person is anxious, the body releases stress hormones (called cortisol), which activates the [body's flight or fight response](#). Because high levels of cortisol constrict [blood vessels](#) and blood flow, this can make it difficult to get (or maintain) an erection.

There are any number of reasons why young men may experience anxiety, especially surrounding sex. Some of the most common reasons include:

- low desire
- feeling of guilt and shame
- relationship problems
- confusion about sexuality
- religious beliefs
- poor sex education
- poor body image
- fear of pregnancy and STIs.

Understanding the root cause of your anxiety is key in treating erection problems.

Take for example if a person's erection problems are caused by anxiety stemming from low libido. They may feel guilty that they cannot satisfy their partner and may feel a sense of shame because of it. Without talking to their partner or a healthcare professional about it, they may only continue in a cycle where their anxiety worsens because of their erection problems, and their erection problems worsen because of their anxiety.

What you can do

With still so much stigma around sex, it's understandable why many young men are unsure of who to turn to for help—and may instead reach for an over-the-counter quick fix. However, because each person is different, it's important you consult with a GP first about whether or not this is good for you before trying. It's also important to note that Viagra is limited in what it can do, and may not be the fix that many hope it will be.

Viagra is a [PDE5 inhibitor](#). This can help more blood flow into the penis when aroused—[prolonging an erection](#).

However, Viagra [cannot produce instant, spontaneous erections](#) without feeling aroused. Heavy alcohol consumption may also make it less effective. This is because alcohol reduces [blood flow](#) to the penis, making it difficult to achieve and maintain erections. So while Viagra may work for some, it isn't something that should be relied upon, especially if your erection problems are caused by anxiety.

As such, it's important to also take strides to address your anxiety. This will help you get to the root of it and overcome your erection problems.

If you aren't sure where to start, the first and most important thing you should do is speak with your partner (if you're in a relationship) about how you feel so you can explore together to find different ways to have sex and intimacy.

You could also try some simple techniques to relieve anxiety surrounding sex, such as aiming to make sex less "goal-oriented" or practicing mindfulness. This can help calm you by redirecting attention away from negative self-talk, and back to the [way you are feeling during sex](#).

But if you continue to have problems long-term, or when symptoms cause significant distress for you (or your partner), it may be time to seek professional support. Visit your GP first to cancel out any organic causes (such as from other health conditions). They may also refer you to a psychosexual therapist. Psychosexual therapy can be especially beneficial, as it may help you better connect your mind and body, understand why you're feeling the way you do and learn specific techniques to overcome your anxiety.

Lastly, it's worth pointing out as a practicing sex and relationship therapist, that it's not uncommon to experience anxiety about sex. It's also normal to sometimes experience problems getting or maintaining an [erection](#). Erection problems can often be treated—so there's no need to suffer in silence if you need help.

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