

Colorectal surgery

Erectile dysfunction from colorectal cancer treatment

Information for patients

Introduction

This leaflet is designed to help you understand erectile dysfunction (ED), also known as impotence, and how we can help you. It is not meant to replace the discussion between you and your medical team. This leaflet also introduces some of the key people involved in your care and explains what you can expect from us. A member of the team will talk to you about your treatment and options. It may be helpful to include a partner, family member or close friend in the discussions, so that they can support you. If you have any questions, please contact your colorectal clinical nurse specialist (CNS). Contact details are listed at the end of the leaflet.

What is ED?

ED is the inability to achieve and maintain an erection firm enough for sex. ED is common in men over 40. It can also be caused by chemotherapy, radiotherapy and/or surgery at any age. The nerves in your pelvis may be damaged during treatment resulting in ED. We make every effort to prevent this.

Emotional issues related to your cancer diagnosis and treatment can also influence whether you are affected by ED. Your CNS is available to speak to you about this, if that is helpful. It may be that ED only affects you in the short-term. However, it can also last for longer and, in some cases, may be permanent.

Before your treatment

Although sex and intimacy may not be at the forefront of your mind at this time, we will discuss the risk of ED with you before your treatment. We encourage you to talk openly to your partner to express how you are feeling about intimacy and sex and what the future may hold. We can also provide specific advice and refer you to specialist teams who can help if you are affected by ED. We offer sperm banking which can be arranged before your treatment.

Maintaining a healthy weight and diet, stopping smoking (if relevant), exercising daily and trying to reduce stress and anxiety will all benefit your overall health, as well as reducing your chances of being affected by ED after treatment. We encourage you to maintain a healthy lifestyle.

What happens after your treatment?

We will see you in the clinic regularly following your treatment. We will assess how you are managing from many different aspects. As part of this we may ask about your sexual function and offer support. We know that, sometimes, it can take a few months after treatment before your usual sexual function returns, so we can provide regular assessment and support for this.

These conversations could make you feel embarrassed as we may ask you intimate questions about your personal life. However, we encourage you to tell us if you are experiencing ED so that we can try to help you.

If you require a referral to a specialist ED clinic your consultant, CNS and GP can assist with this. We hold clinics at St Mary's Hospital on the first floor of the Jefferiss wing (Winsland clinic). At your first appointment one of the doctors will see you for an initial consultation. You may then be given treatment or be referred to other members of the team, such as a sex therapist, psychologist, or physiotherapist.

You will receive a follow-up appointment for the ED clinic, to see either the doctor again or one of the nurses, to assess your response to treatment. Although you are seen at the ED clinic, you will remain under the care of your colorectal cancer team. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times. Please ask your CNS for further information about a referral to the ED clinic.

What to expect from us

The colorectal team will support you throughout the stages of your treatment. This includes:

- honest and accurate information about your treatment options
- opportunities for support and discussion with your CNS, surgeon and other specialists
- written information to help you make decisions and regarding your recovery
- communication with your GP, including clinic letters, to ensure they are kept informed and can continue to support you

How to contact us

Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust has a Macmillan navigator service for access to your CNS and other members of the clinical team. Navigators can also help with queries and provide a range of other information, help and support relating to your care. The service is available Monday to Friday 08.00–18.00 and 09.00–17.00 at weekends. Telephone: **020 3313 0303**

How do I make a comment about my visit?

If you have any **suggestions** or **comments** about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (**PALS**) on **020 3313 0088** (Charing Cross, Hammersmith and Queen Charlotte's & Chelsea hospitals), or **020 3312 7777** (St Mary's and Western Eye hospitals). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net. The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf. Alternatively, you may wish to express your concerns in **writing** to: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY.

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print, as a sound recording, in Braille, or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:

imperial.patient.information@nhs.net

We have a free wi-fi service (for basic filtered browsing) and a premium wi-fi service (requiring payment) at each of our five hospitals. Look for WiFiSPARK_FREE or WiFiSPARK_PREMIUM