

## SPOTLIGHT ON...

# MALE SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION

## *How to offer support and talk to your partner*

**Sexual dysfunction is something that everyone is likely to experience at some point in their lives. When it comes to male sexual dysfunction, there are a host of issues that can stop a man from enjoying a satisfying sex life, however the two main culprits are erectile dysfunction (ED) and premature ejaculation (PE). If you're currently experiencing these problems within your relationship, you'll know that they're very sensitive subjects and can be hard to navigate. We spoke to Teresa Bergin, a sex and relationship therapist, to find out more.**

What is erectile dysfunction?

"Essentially it's the inability to get an erection or to maintain an erection.

"Some men will experience it as not being able to get an erection at all and others they [will] get an erection but lose it at some point during either intercourse or foreplay," says Teresa.

When it comes to the causes of ED, Teresa says it's important for men over the age of 40 to have a medical check-up, as sometimes it can be a marker for cardiovascular disease or diabetes. It can also be a side effect of certain kinds of medications.

"However, in the vast majority of cases, the cause is psychological. Now what I mean by that is I'm talking about anxiety," says Teresa.


"So if a man loses an erection on one occasion, for example if he's had a little bit too much alcohol, and he doesn't get anxious about it and he puts it down to that, he can go on and get past that quite easily.

"If he, on a subsequent occasion, loses an erection again it sets up a cycle of anxiety. So on every other occasion he starts thinking, 'Will it happen this time? How will it go? How will my partner react?'"

These anxious thoughts can then spiral out of control and "set the problem in motion" as Teresa says. So each time a man goes to have sex, the anxiety gets stronger, which then causes ED.

Understandably, ED is a sensitive topic to discuss with your partner, so what's the best way to broach the subject?

"First of all you need to approach this problem sensitively because most men, when they eventually get to talk about it, they would say their erectile ability or difficulty goes right to the heart of their masculinity. So the erectile difficulty will impact on how he sees



**"Blaming or shaming a partner will only build anxiety and tension and make the problem worse"**

himself as a man," says Teresa.

"We're socialised to believe that our worth comes from what we do or how we perform rather than who we are. Erectile dysfunction can lead a man to feel inadequate or a failure actually, especially because sex is the most intimate and vulnerable part of our lives. You're talking then about a really significant impact

on self-esteem, self-worth, confidence and so the topic needs to be approached very sensitively with a lot of compassion, empathy and acceptance and to be as kind as you can, reassuring him that just being together and being intimate, that's wonderful.

"That's enough even if the erection doesn't happen and that kind of reassurance can go a long way in helping the