

UNDERSTANDING PREMATURE EJACULATION (PE)

Premature ejaculation (PE) is one of the most common sexual concerns among men, affecting approximately 20-30% of men at some point in their lives. It is characterised by the inability to delay ejaculation during sexual activity, leading to dissatisfaction for both the individual and their partner. While PE can occur occasionally, it becomes a clinical issue when it consistently disrupts sexual pleasure and intimacy.

This guide explores the causes of PE, its impact on relationships, available treatments, and strategies to manage and overcome the condition.

CAUSES OF PREMATURE EJACULATION

PE can have a variety of causes, often involving a combination of physical, psychological, and relationship factors. Some of the most common causes include:

1. PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS:

PERFORMANCE ANXIETY

- Worrying about sexual performance or fearing premature ejaculation can create a self-fulfilling cycle, making it harder to control ejaculation.

STRESS AND DEPRESSION

- High levels of stress and underlying depression can contribute to PE, affecting libido and ejaculatory control.

RELATIONSHIP ISSUES

- Communication problems, unresolved conflicts, or a lack of emotional intimacy can lead to difficulties with sexual performance.

2. BIOLOGICAL FACTORS: NEUROBIOLOGICAL ISSUES

- Overactivity of certain neurotransmitters in the brain may lead to PE. For example, excessive levels of serotonin, a neurotransmitter involved in sexual arousal, can result in faster ejaculation.

HORMONAL IMBALANCES

- Abnormal levels of testosterone or thyroid hormones may influence ejaculatory timing.

GENETIC PREDISPOSITION

- Some men may be more likely to experience PE due to genetic factors affecting their sensitivity to sexual stimuli.

MEDICAL CONDITIONS

- Health conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, or prostate issues may contribute to PE by affecting nerve function or blood flow.

3. LIFESTYLE FACTORS: SUBSTANCE USE

- Excessive alcohol or drug use can interfere with sexual function, while drug withdrawal can lead to sudden changes in sexual performance.

LACK OF SEXUAL EXPERIENCE

- Men with limited sexual experience may have trouble controlling ejaculation, which can improve with practice and time.

SYMPTOMS OF PREMATURE EJACULATION

The main symptom of PE is the inability to delay ejaculation, resulting in ejaculation that occurs within **one minute** of penetration. This may lead to:

- A lack of sexual satisfaction for both partners.
- Frustration, anxiety, or embarrassment for the man.
- Strained relationships due to reduced sexual intimacy or communication difficulties.

PE is diagnosed when this pattern occurs consistently over several months and impacts a man's well-being or relationship satisfaction.

TREATMENT OPTIONS FOR PREMATURE EJACULATION

Fortunately, PE is treatable, and there are several approaches to managing the condition. Treatment options may vary based on the underlying cause and the severity of the symptoms.

1. BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES:

THE "STOP-START" TECHNIQUE

- This involves the man stopping sexual activity when he feels close to ejaculation and waiting for the sensation to subside before resuming. Over time, this can help him gain better control over ejaculation.

THE "SQUEEZE" TECHNIQUE

- In this method, the man or his partner gently squeezes the end of the penis when he feels close to ejaculation, helping to delay it. This can also train the body to increase ejaculatory control.

KEGEL EXERCISES

- Kegel exercises, which strengthen the pelvic floor muscles, can help men gain more control over ejaculation. These exercises involve contracting and relaxing the pelvic muscles in a controlled manner.

2. MEDICATIONS:

SELECTIVE SEROTONIN REUPTAKE INHIBITORS (SSRIS)

- These antidepressant medications, such as sertraline or fluoxetine, are often prescribed off-label to delay ejaculation by increasing serotonin levels in the brain, which can help delay the ejaculatory reflex.

TOPICAL ANESTHETICS

- Creams or sprays containing lidocaine or prilocaine can be applied to the penis to reduce sensation and delay ejaculation. They are used shortly before intercourse and can be effective in extending the time to ejaculation.

DAPOXETINE

- This is a short-acting SSRI that is specifically approved in some countries, including Australia, for the treatment of PE. It can be taken on demand before sexual activity to delay ejaculation.

PHOSPHODIESTERASE-5 INHIBITORS

- Medications like sildenafil (Viagra) or tadalafil (Cialis) are sometimes used in combination with other treatments to address erectile dysfunction (ED) that may coexist with PE.

3. COUNSELING AND THERAPY:

COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY (CBT)

- CBT is effective for addressing the psychological aspects of PE, such as performance anxiety or stress. It helps men reframe negative thoughts and develop healthier sexual attitudes. MyHixel is a new device which patients can use which incorporates CBT.

COUPLES THERAPY

- Working with a therapist as a couple can help address relationship issues, improve communication, and reduce stress during sexual encounters.

4. LIFESTYLE MODIFICATIONS:

STRESS REDUCTION

- Incorporating relaxation techniques like yoga, meditation, or deep-breathing exercises can reduce anxiety and improve overall sexual function.

MODERATING ALCOHOL AND DRUG USE

- Limiting the consumption of alcohol and avoiding recreational drugs can improve sexual function and reduce the risk of PE.

PREVALENCE OF PREMATURE EJACULATION

Premature ejaculation is a common condition that affects a significant number of men worldwide. In Australia:

- 1 in 5 men are estimated to experience PE at some point in their lives.
- A study published by the International Society for Sexual Medicine (ISSM) found that approximately 30% of men in Australia report symptoms of PE, with the majority seeking treatment to improve their sexual health and relationship satisfaction.

The condition can affect men of all ages, although it tends to be more prevalent among younger men, with a greater frequency observed in those under 40.

SUPPORTING MEN AND THEIR PARTNERS

FOR MEN

ACKNOWLEDGE THE ISSUE

- Understanding that PE is a common and treatable condition can help reduce feelings of embarrassment or frustration.

SEEK HELP EARLY

- If PE is impacting your sexual satisfaction or relationship, seek medical advice to discuss treatment options.

PRACTICE RELAXATION

- Reducing stress and practicing relaxation techniques can help reduce the anxiety that often accompanies PE.

USE BEHAVIORAL TECHNIQUES

- Engage in methods like the “stop-start” or “squeeze” techniques to improve ejaculatory control over time.

FOR PARTNERS BE SUPPORTIVE

- Offer emotional support and understanding without judgment, as performance anxiety can exacerbate the condition.

COMMUNICATE OPENLY

- Discuss sexual concerns openly with your partner to strengthen your emotional connection and reduce pressure.

WORK TOGETHER

- Explore treatment options together, such as attending therapy sessions or learning new techniques to improve intimacy.

WHEN TO SEE A DOCTOR

Consult a healthcare professional if:

- You consistently experience premature ejaculation.
- Your symptoms have persisted for several months or longer.
- The condition is impacting your relationships or self-esteem.
- You have underlying health concerns, such as erectile dysfunction or mental health conditions.

A healthcare provider will typically conduct a physical exam, review your medical history, and may recommend further testing or treatment options to address PE effectively.

CONCLUSION

Premature ejaculation is a treatable condition, and many men can regain control over their sexual performance with the right approach. With a combination of behavioral techniques, medication, therapy, and lifestyle modifications, men can significantly improve their ejaculatory control, enhance sexual satisfaction, and strengthen relationships.

It's important to address PE openly and seek professional guidance to find the best treatment approach tailored to your individual needs. With support and the right strategies, premature ejaculation can be effectively managed, leading to a more fulfilling sexual life.

PEER-REVIEWED REFERENCES

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