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## Erection Problems

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### Erection Problems

Not long ago, doctors and psychologists believed that 90 percent of erection difficulties were psychological and that a stimulating partner was all a man needed. Now authorities agree that most erection impairment has a physical cause: clogged arteries, alcohol or other drugs, diabetes, pelvic injuries, sleep deprivation, smoking or prostate surgery.

But how can a man know if his erection problem is physical or psychological? I like the postage-stamp test mentioned by herb advocate Andrew Weil, M.D., professor at the University of Arizona College of Medicine in Tucson and author of *Natural Health, Natural Medicine*. It is based on the fact that a normally functioning man has spontaneous erections in his sleep every night.

To take this test, fasten a strip of postage stamps around the shaft of your penis before you go to bed. If the strip is intact in the morning, you have not had any erections during sleep, and there is probably something wrong physically. If, on the other hand, a nighttime erection broke the stamps as you slept, your penis is working okay, and the problem may well be psychological.

This test is not foolproof, but it's a good place to start. The next logical step, of course, is to discuss the results with your doctor.

Impotence is the inability to raise or sustain an erection that is adequate for intercourse and ejaculation. Some 30 million American men experience some form of impotence, with more than a million currently being treated. Some take prescription medication. Others get penile implants. The newest approach involves self-injecting a hormone known as prostaglandin E. Within a few minutes, it produces a 90-minute erection.

### Green Pharmacy for Erection Problems

But before you go sticking needles into your penis, you might try some of these herbal approaches.

☘☘☘ **Fava bean (*Vicia faba*).** Alleged to have incited the ancient Roman poet Cicero to passion, the fava bean is our best food source of the compound L-dopa, which is often used to treat Parkinson's disease. Large amounts of L-dopa may cause priapism, a painful, persistent erection that has nothing to do with sexual arousal.

I wouldn't advocate doses of L-dopa large enough to cause priapism, but you'd be hard put to eat enough fava beans to ever cause a problem. Fava beans have an age-old reputation as an aphrodisiac. I suspect that a big serving--8 to 16 ounces--just might contain enough L-dopa to give erection a nice boost.

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- [Spondylitis](#) If fava beans seem to help, try sprouting them. The sprouts contain even more L-dopa.
13. [Arthritis](#)
14. [Asthma](#)  **Ginkgo (*Ginkgo biloba*)**. Ginkgo is best known for improving blood flow through the brain. But it also seems to boost blood flow into the penis, thus aiding iffy erections.
15. [Athletes Foot](#)
16. [Backache](#)
17. [Bad Breath](#)
18. [Baldness](#)
19. [Bladder Infections](#)
20. [Body Odor](#)
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39. [Dandruff](#)
40. [Depression](#)
41. [Diabetes](#)
42. [Diarrhea](#)
43. [Diverticulitis](#)
44. [Dizziness](#)
45. [Dry Mouth](#)
46. [Earache](#)
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50. [Fainting](#)
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55. [Genital Herpes and Cold Sores](#)
56. [Gingivitis](#)
57. [Glaucoma](#)
58. [Gout](#)
59. [Graves Disease](#)
60. [Hangover](#)
61. [Headache](#)
- In several small studies, physicians have obtained very good results with 60 to 240 milligrams daily of a standardized ginkgo extract. In one nine-month study, 78 percent of men with impotence due to atherosclerotic clogging of the penile artery reported significant improvement without side effects.
- People normally think of atherosclerosis as a disease that clogs the blood vessels that supply the heart, thereby leading to heart attacks. This same disease can also clog the blood vessels that supply the penis and lead to erection problems.
- In another six-month study, half of the men being treated with ginkgo regained their erections. The active compounds are too dilute in ginkgo leaves to do much good, so standardized extracts concentrate it: A 50:1 extract means that 50 pounds of leaves were used to produce 1 pound of extract. These extracts are available at many health food stores and herb shops.
- You can try 60 to 240 milligrams a day, but don't go any higher than that. In large amounts, ginkgo may cause diarrhea, irritability and restlessness. And do give it time to work. In about six months, you'll know whether it's going to do the trick.
-  **Velvet bean (*Mucuna, various species*)**. Years ago, while working in Panama, I was told by more than one informant that the seeds of the velvet or ox-eye bean (in Spanish, *ojo de buey*) were aphrodisiac. That was before I knew that these seeds can contain as much L-dopa as fava beans, and perhaps more.
-  **Yohimbe (*Pausinystalia yohimbe*)**. For at least ten years, I have maintained that if there is a real herbal erection enhancer, yohimbe is it. I based this on centuries of folklore about the African tree bark and a few small clinical trials that showed that the herb produced erections in about half of men with psychological impotence and about 40 percent with physical erection problems.
- Unfortunately, the side effects were a little unnerving, including anxiety, increased heart rate, elevated blood pressure, flushing, hallucinations and headache. This is not an herb that you want to mess around with.
- But then the drug companies got into the act. They figured out how to extract the active compound and eventually won approval for yohimbine hydrochloride (Yocon, Yohimex) as a prescription medication. After one month, 14 percent of men taking it reported restoration of full and sustained erections, 20 percent reported partial responses, and 65 percent reported no improvement. Still, one-third improved, which isn't bad.
- Generally, I advocate taking a whole herb rather than a pharmaceutical derivative, but this is an exception to my rule. Compared with the raw herb, the prescription drug causes fewer side effects, and those are generally benign. If I had erection difficulties, I might ask my doctor to put me on yohimbine.

## Stiff Drinks for Better Performance

I do a lot of traveling in Latin America, and the herbal formulas I find there--and people's faith in them--never cease to amaze me.

When it comes to enhancing men's sexual potency, there is a very long list of herbs with a reputation for delivering. I find a couple of alcoholic beverages made from herbal formulas added to a wine or rum base to be particularly intriguing.

One is *siete raices*. In English this translates to "seven roots," which is rather odd, because the drink is made from seven dried barks. The other is *rompe calzon*--"bust your britches." The name comes from its folklore reputation for producing erections large enough to strain trouser material. (I'm not making this up.)

62. [Heartburn](#)
63. [Heart Disease](#)
64. [Hemorrhoids](#)
65. [High Blood Pressure](#)
66. [High Cholesterol](#)
67. [Hives](#)
68. [Hiv Infection Aids](#)
69. [Hypothyroidism](#)
70. [Indigestion](#)
71. [Infertility](#)
72. [Inflammatory Bowel Disease](#)
73. [Inhibited Sexual Desire in Women](#)
74. [Insect Bites and Stings](#)
75. [Insomnia](#)
76. [Intermittent Claudication](#)
77. [Intestinal Parasites](#)
78. [Laryngitis](#)
79. [Lice](#)
80. [Liver Problems](#)
81. [Lyme Disease](#)
82. [Macular Degeneration](#)
83. [Menopause](#)
84. [Menstrual Cramps](#)
85. [Morning Sickness](#)
86. [Motion Sickness](#)
87. [Multiple Sclerosis](#)
88. [Nausea](#)
89. [Osteoporosis](#)
90. [Overweight](#)
91. [Pain](#)
92. [Parkinsons Disease](#)
93. [Pneumonia](#)
94. [Poison Ivy Oak and Sumac](#)
95. [Pregnancy and Delivery](#)
96. [Premenstrual Syndrome](#)
97. [Prostate Enlargement](#)
98. [Psoriasis](#)
99. [Raynauds Disease](#)
100. [Scabies](#)
101. [Sciatica](#)
102. [Shingles](#)
103. [Sinusitis](#)
104. [Skin Problems](#)
105. [Smoking](#)
106. [Sores](#)
107. [Sore Throat](#)
108. [Sties](#)
- There is only anecdotal evidence that *rompe calzon* stimulates erotic interest, but those anecdotes sure sell a lot of this brew in Latin American countries. I confess that I've tried it myself and haven't found it all that stimulating.
- You won't be able to buy either of these formulas in the states, but one ingredient common to both may be available here. Clavohuasca (*Tynnanthus panurensis*) is an aromatic vine that is often found climbing to the forest canopy in Amazonian Peru, where I lead my Rainforest Pharmacy Workshops.
- One traveler in my first Physician's Workshop, an acclaimed herbalist himself, says he has empirical evidence that tincture of clavohuasca, a rather pleasant and warming liqueur, sexually excites both the male and female of the human species--namely him and his wife.
- I know of only one herb shop in the United States that carries tincture of clavohuasca, Smile Herb Shop in College Park, Maryland, so I'm assuming that it's imported and can be found in other herb shops. If you're anxious to give it a try, you might have to search for it--but you'd have to work a whole lot harder to get your hands on either siete raices or rompe calzon.
-  **Anise (*Pimpinella anisum*).** Anise contains several compounds that are estrogenic, so it might seem an unlikely herb for erection problems. Estrogen is a female hormone, and a number of plants contain substances that act like this hormone in the body. That's why they're called estrogenic. Oddly enough, though, some people who have used estrogenic herbs report androgenic (male sex hormone) effects as well. And anise has a reputation for increasing male libido.
- I think anise is worth a try, which is why it's an ingredient in my Erector Set Tea: Combine to taste a dash or two of anise, cardamom, epimedium, ginger and ginseng. Sweeten with licorice root.
-  **Cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum*).** This herb contains at least two androgenic compounds. For centuries, Arab cultures have held this spice in high esteem as an aphrodisiac, thus Arab coffee houses often mix some into coffee.
- What could account for cardamom's aphrodisiac reputation? In my database, cardamom shows up as the best source of the compound cineole. Cineole is a central nervous system stimulant, and people have a way of thinking that any stimulation is sexual stimulation. It probably can't hurt to spike your coffee or tea with a little cardamom, though, and this herb tastes good, too.
-  **Cinnamon (*Cinnamomum, various species*).** Alan Hirsch, M.D., director of the Smell and Taste Research Foundation in Chicago, attached measurement devices to the penises of medical students to test their reactions to various aromas. The smell of hot cinnamon buns generated the most blood flow, hence suggesting the most help for erections. A combination of the aromas of pumpkin pie (pumpkin plus nutmeg) and lavender also stimulated penile blood flow.
- Okay, I know that all of this sounds somewhat far-fetched, but these are valid scientific studies we're talking about. How do you take advantage of this research? Well, if the way to a man's heart really is through his stomach--and you want to get somewhere else as well--why not give him cinnamon buns and pumpkin pie?
-  **Ginger (*Zingiber officinale*).** In an article titled "Studies on Herbal Aphrodisiacs Used in the Arab System of Medicine" published in the *American Journal of Chinese Medicine*, some Saudi scientists asserted that ginger extracts significantly increase sperm motility and quantity.
- Ginger, a botanically close relative of cardamom, certainly has a piquant taste, and maybe it stirs enough sexual interest to help a flagging erection. I make no promises, but I have great respect for folk medical traditions, which is why I include both ginger and cardamom in my Erector Set Tea.
-  **Ginseng (*Panax, various species*).** American Ginseng (*P. quinquefolius*) is probably North America's most famous--and perhaps most overrated--aphrodisiac. Even though studies have shown that animals increase their sexual activity when they eat ginseng, I'm not entirely convinced

- 109. [Stroke](#)
- 110. [Sunburn](#)
- 111. [Swelling](#)
- 112. [Tinnitus](#)
- 113. [Tonsillitis](#)
- 114. [Toothache](#)
- 115. [Tooth Decay](#)
- 116. [Tuberculosis](#)
- 117. [Ulcers](#)
- 118. [Vaginitis](#)
- 119. [Varicose Veins](#)
- 120. [Viral Infections](#)
- 121. [Warts](#)
- 122. [Worms](#)
- 123. [Wrinkles](#)
- 124. [Yeast Infection](#)
- 125. [Green Pharmacy Authors Postscript](#)

that this herb will spark anyone's fire.

Still, I grow several varieties--American, Asian (*P. ginseng*) and Siberian (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*), which is also known as eleuthero. I'm not currently using any of these herbs, however, as they are expensive. But I am preparing for old age by holding some in reserve just in case the Chinese are correct in saying that ginseng makes an old man young again. America, by the way, exports close to \$100 million worth of ginseng annually, mostly to Asians who have great faith in American Ginseng and regard it as the herbal fountain of youth.



☘☘ **Muira puama (*Ptychopetalum, various species*)**. There is one study showing that this little-known Amazonian tree "may be effective in restoring libido and treating erectile dysfunction," according to Melvin Werbach, M.D., assistant clinical professor of psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Medicine, and naturopathic physician Michael Murray, N.D., who cited the study in their book *Botanical Influences on Illness*. Of 262 men taking 1 to 2.5 grams (1½ to 1¼ teaspoons) of muira puama extract a day for two weeks, 51 percent of those with erection problems reported improvement, as did 62 percent of those with loss of libido. I confess I haven't reviewed the original study, but if I had an erection problem, I might try this herb. You can find it in some herb stores. So far I have seen no reports of side effects. (Some men find the Amazonian ladies so attractive as to render the muira puama superfluous.)

☘☘ **Oat (*Avena sativa*)**. Stallions that are fed wild oats supposedly become friskier and libidinous, which is where we got the phrase "sowing wild oats." Some studies suggest that oats are a sexual stimulant for the human male as well. Esteemed California herbalist Kathi Keville, author of *The Illustrated Herb Encyclopedia* and *Herbs for Health and Healing*, includes the herb in the tea she recommends to men: a half-ounce each of wild oats, ginkgo leaves, ginseng root, yohimbe bark and damiana leaves. I'd recommend the same, but leave out the yohimbe bark, for the reasons I've given previously. (If you want the effects of yohimbe bark, ask your doctor for a prescription for yohimbine instead.) Steep this mixture in a pint or two of boiling water, then let it cool before drinking.

☘☘ **Quebracho (*Aspidosperma quebracho-blanco*)**. In South America, this herb, which the Food and Drug Administration includes on its list of herbs generally recognized as safe, is considered a male aphrodisiac. It does contain the proven erection-raising compound yohimbine, but I'm leery of the herb yohimbe for the reasons I've given previously. If you do use it, make a tea by steeping about five teaspoons of bark per cup of boiling water and sweeten it with licorice root. But don't try this herb if you have high blood pressure, and if you experience any side effects, such as dizziness, don't use it again.

☘☘ **Wolfberry (*Lycium chinense*)**. Can the wolfberry make a young wolf out of an old man? In one study, men over age 59 ate about two ounces (50 grams) of wolfberries a day for ten days and came away with significantly raised testosterone levels. Raising testosterone boosts male sexuality only in cases of a deficiency of this male hormone, but some elderly men do become deficient. Perhaps that's why the Chinese consider wolfberries to have anti-aging properties.

☘ **Ashwaganda (*Withania somnifera*)**. Practitioners of Ayurvedic medicine, the traditional medicine of India, regard this root as the Indian answer to ginseng for the male libido. Ashwaganda, they claim, can help treat impotence and male infertility. But I wouldn't recommend taking this particular herb every day--just occasionally. Try a cup or two of tea made with five

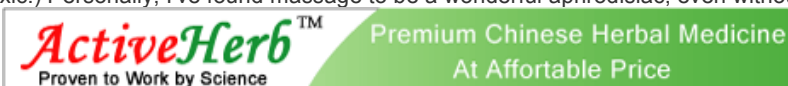
teaspoons of dried herb per cup of boiling water.

🌿 **Country mallow (*Sida cordifolia*)**. Here's another stimulant herb with a folk reputation as an erection-enhancing aphrodisiac. Its stimulant compound is ephedrine, the same one found in Chinese ephedra, the decongestant, anti-asthma herb. Country mallow contains some 850 parts per million of ephedrine, which probably explains its use for impotence. As with caffeine, ephedrine can get you wired, and some men experience that as sexual arousal.

🌿 **Guarana (*Paullinia cupana*)**. Brazilians drink gallons of guarana tea and guarana soft drinks and often mention it as an aphrodisiac. The reason is that this herb contains a fair amount of caffeine, and traditionally, any stimulant eventually came to be viewed as a sexual stimulant. Drink guarana if you like, try a few teaspoons per cup of boiling water, then see how amorous you feel. (You could simply drink some coffee, tea, Coke or Pepsi, but that's not going to have the same exotic appeal. When it comes to sexual enhancement, anything that engages your mind in the process can prove helpful.)

🌿 **Saw palmetto (*Serenoa repens*)**. This small palm tree native to the Southeast has been shown to help shrink enlarged prostate tissue. But a century ago, it was also considered useful for treating impotence and loss of libido. The main effect of saw palmetto is that it shrinks the prostate, allowing older men to urinate more freely. Prostate enlargement does not necessarily interfere with sexual function, but relieving the condition can only help men feel better about their sexual equipment, which just might be of some help with erection.

🌿 **Assorted essential oils**. For erection problems, aromatherapists often recommend whole-body massage with a combination of a few drops of the essential oils of clary sage, jasmine and rose mixed into a vegetable oil base. (Remember not to ingest the oil, however, as even a small amount can be toxic.) Personally, I've found massage to be a wonderful aphrodisiac, even without



the aromatic oils.

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