

Can Pelvic Floor Exercises Help Erectile Dysfunction?

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Erectile dysfunction is defined as the persistent failure to achieve and sustain erections that are sufficiently rigid to allow penetration during sexual intercourse. There are many factors involved in erectile dysfunction and the condition should be medically evaluated fully to determine the causes and the appropriate treatment. Standard and acceptable treatments include sex therapy, oral medication, vacuum devices, intercavernosal injections, intra-urethral therapy, and in some cases, surgery. Pelvic floor exercise for the treatment of erectile dysfunction is not generally suggested as the first line of treatment for erectile dysfunction. However, depending on the cause of the problem, strengthening the pelvic floor may be an effective part of the solution.

The role of the pelvic floor muscles is to help support our internal organs as well as to help close our sphincters, in order to control our urine and bowel movements. The role of the pelvic floor muscles in enhancing sexual activity is not all that well understood. We do know that when the muscles contract during sexual activity, they help blood flow which helps maintain a good erection. We also know, that the superficial muscles surrounding the penis, the ishiocavernous and bulbocavernous muscles, help to increase pressure on the veins which prevent blood from escaping, thereby maintaining an erection. Contraction of these muscles also increases the pressure inside the penis which increases the rigidity of the erection.

There are a few studies that have been published, that have looked at whether or not, and under what circumstances, pelvic floor muscle exercises can be effective in helping men with erectile dysfunction. Research, from the University of West of England in Bristol, published in the November 2004 edition of the The Royal College of General Practitioners British Journal of General Practice compared different treatments for erectile dysfunction. As part of their treatment plan, patients were asked to complete 30-minutes of daily pelvic floor exercises, over a three month period. Participants were also given advice concerning their smoking, alcohol intake, general fitness and weight reduction.

Forty per cent of the men participating in a research project reported that their sex lives were back to normal after carrying out the exercises for the three months. A further 34% reported that their sex lives had improved as a result of doing the pelvic floor exercises. It is important to note that the subjects chosen for this study, did not have any neurological impairments and that the mean age was 59 years old.

Another study, from Belgium reported the results of physiotherapy treatment for 51 men with erectile dysfunction, mainly due to either circulatory or psycho-sexual causes, or a combination of both. These men, in addition to performing exercises, were treated with biofeedback of the pelvic floor as well as electrical stimulation. Biofeedback was performed by inserting a probe in the anus so the men could visualize on a computer screen, the strength and activity of the muscles. Electrical stimulation was provided through the probe, to stimulate the muscles to contract passively. The mean age of the men in this study was 46 years old. In this study, 47% of the patients regained normal erectile function, and 24% had an improved erection. In another study on 150 men with erectile dysfunction due to venous leakage, 42% regained an erection with only pelvic floor exercises.

The results of these studies are significant because it provides an additional treatment option for men, many of whom for various reasons, are unable or unwilling to use medication. This particular option is inexpensive, easy, and there is minimal risk for harm.