

## Confidence robbing condition compromising mental wellbeing of one-in-three Aussie men aged 40+ new research

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**Prof Helen O'Connell, AO,  
Urological Surgeon, and President,  
Urological Society of Australia and  
New Zealand (USANZ), *MELBOURNE***



Grab A

What is erectile dysfunction or ED?

Erectile dysfunction is a condition that affects men whereby they are unable to achieve an erection that's satisfactory enough for intercourse to occur. It's a super common condition with a number of underlying conditions potentially causing it, and then sometimes treatments can cause the problem as well.

Grab B

According to the new research, how many men does ED affect in Australia?

As many as one in two men over 40 years of age are affected by the problem. So where it was thought to be about one in three or even one in five, this new data really indicates the extent to which it's affecting men.

Grab C

How many men living with severe ED seek treatment?

As few as 14 per cent of men who are even severely affected with ED will seek treatment. This is a public health problem, isn't it? It's of such common, it's so common in the experience of men to be affecting 50 per cent of men over 40 and increasing with age.

So it's a hugely common problem. And then only this small group of people are seeking help.

Grab D

New research reveals only one in three men living with ED seek treatment. What barriers do men face with seeking treatment?

As few as 35 per cent of men who've got erectile dysfunction seeking treatment. So for quite a lot of people, it's an embarrassing condition. They don't want to overt it, they don't want to talk about it. They think that it'll get better on its own. They're worried about their loss of masculinity and how it makes them look to be seeking help. So there are all these barriers, if you like, that are psychological to seeking help.

Grab E

What is your message to men living with ED?

As the President of the Urological Society of Australia and New Zealand, I want men to know that we see this as an important problem; that we want to empower them and encourage them to seek treatment if they're affected by this. Don't suffer in silence. Do something about it. Yes, it may take a little bit of courage to address the problem, but there are potential rewards for your relationship, for your mental health, for your partner and your partnership, in addressing the underlying causes and getting effective treatment.

**Professor Jeff Dunn, AO,  
Chief of Mission and Head of Research  
Prostate Cancer Foundation of  
Australia, *BRISBANE***



**Grab A**

**When are men in Australia most commonly diagnosed with prostate cancer?**

A diagnosis of prostate cancer for men in Australia is most often occurring in the sixties, but there was a broad range. We have men as young as in their thirties being diagnosed, and of course, through to much later in life as well. So, while the average age is around 65, mid-60s, there is a broad range.

**Grab B**

**What do most men experience when diagnosed with prostate cancer?**

Prostate cancer is a life-threatening disease, and a diagnosis of prostate cancer brings a whole range of things to an individual, to a person, to their partner, and to their family.

**Grab C**

**Can you explain the physical, psychological and social wellbeing-related side-effects experienced by many men treated for prostate cancer?**

Being treated for prostate cancer can lead to a range of side-effects – physical, psychological, and social. Physically, erectile dysfunction can be a significant impact or side-effect of treatment. Psychologically, men can get a challenge to their sense of self, to their identity – they can have concerns and anxieties. We know, for example, that at any one time, up to 30 per cent of men diagnosed with prostate cancer have clinically significant levels of anxiety and distress.

**Grab D**

**What is a common side-effect of undergoing prostate cancer treatment?**

For men out there diagnosed and treated for prostate cancer, many of them may have to face the challenge of erectile dysfunction.

**Grab E**

**What are some of the challenges experienced by men who have not only battled prostate cancer, but are also forced to contend with erectile dysfunction or ED?**

A diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer has those physical side-effects. But of course, they can lead to social, emotional and family-related concerns as well. In dealing with these things men face frustrations, they face anxieties, they can feel isolated. It can cause family and relationship issues, and erectile dysfunction can be a contributor to those concerns for men.

**Grab F**

**What Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia programs and services are available to men who have undergone prostate cancer treatment?**

Prostate Cancer Foundation Australia has specialist nurses experienced and skillful in this area, who men can talk to, and they can do that face to face, or they can do that over the phone.

## Grab G

What is your message to men who have been diagnosed and treated for prostate cancer and are dealing with ED?

For men out there who have been diagnosed and treated for prostate cancer, and are dealing with erectile dysfunction, and for their partners, you don't have to go through this alone. There are professionals that can help. There are things that we can do. Reach out. Talk to a trusted health professional. Make sure that you seek out help.

**Dr Amanda Chung,  
Urological Surgeon, Sydney Urological  
Associates, and Chair, North Shore  
Urology Research Group, *SYDNEY***



**Grab A**

**What is erectile dysfunction or ED?**

Erectile dysfunction or ED is the inability to obtain, or maintain a rigid erection to have a satisfying sex life.

**Grab B**

**What are the risk factors for developing ED?**

The risks factors for developing ED include advancing age, metabolic syndrome, hypertension, cardiovascular disease, but also other treatments or surgeries that affect the pelvic area and that includes treatments for prostate cancer and bowel cancer, for example. Injuries can also cause ED, such as spinal cord injuries and other neurological issues.

**Grab C**

**How many men in Australia are affected by ED?**

Erectile dysfunction or ED affects more than 1 million men in Australia. That's a lot.

**Grab D**

**New Australian research reveals only one in three (34%) men living with ED have sought treatment, despite showing symptoms. Why is this the case?**

Only one in three Australian men seek treatment for their ED. I think there are lots of reasons for that. I think that it really speaks to the shame that they might feel and that private suffering that it can cause and how it can fracture a relationship as well and affect their sense of being a man. I think also there might not be a lot of information or awareness that actually it's a very common problem, so they are not alone.

**Grab E**

**According to the new Australian research, two in five (43%) men living with ED report the condition has compromised their mental health. Can you reflect on these findings?**

Two in five men living with ED have indicated that it affects their mental health. It can cause anxiety, lead to depression, affect how they feel as a person and their masculinity, as well as affect their relationships.

**Grab F**

**How does ED affect relationships?**

ED can have a huge impact on relationships. And not only is that because it can have a huge impact on a man's sense of self, and their confidence in seeking intimacy and closeness. Sometimes it leads to avoidance as well, and that can lead to a misunderstanding in that relationship and in that relationship dynamic.

**Grab G**

**Can ED be treated?**

It can be very easily treated, and there are a lot of treatment options available, ranging from behavioural modifications or lifestyle modifications, medication injections, devices, or even surgery.

So there is a lot of help out there. They do not need to live with this.

**Grab H**

**Why is timely and effective treatment so crucial for men living with ED?**

Timely and effective treatment is so crucial for men living with ED because the longer it goes on, the harder it can become to treat, and that's where sometimes more invasive treatment options are therefore needed in order to restore sex life.

**Grab I**

**What is your message to men living with ED?**

Although it's common, it's not normal, and you don't have to live with it. It's not the end of your sex life. So please feel empowered to tell your GP, seek help from your healthcare provider because there are a lot of treatments available.

**Ken, 70,  
PCaHELP Founder and Chair who  
developed ED after surviving prostate  
cancer, *PERTH***



**Grab A**

**What were you most concerned about regarding undergoing treatment for prostate cancer?**

One of the things I was really concerned about was the side-effects. That is, erectile dysfunction or ED.

**Grab B**

**What is the Prostate Cancer Help Association Incorporated (PCaHELP) and why did you choose to establish the organisation?**

PCaHELP is a not-for-profit Association which is run entirely by volunteers. And the reason we set it up was two-fold. Firstly, we wanted to try and raise awareness of prostate cancer, we want to help people who have experienced prostate cancer. We want to provide services for them that help them through their journey.

**Grab C**

**What symptoms of ED, if any, were you experiencing before undergoing prostate cancer surgery?**

Right up till the day before I had prostate cancer surgery, I had no symptoms whatsoever of ED. And it wasn't until after the surgery that I experienced the ED symptoms.

**Grab D**

**How does it feel to live with ED?**

Living with ED changes your life totally. You basically lose your manhood. It's something that's an important part of every man, and all of a sudden, it's not there anymore. So it's devastating. You feel shameful about it. You want to try and hide from it. Mentally, it's totally debilitating.

**Grab E**

**How did living with ED affect your relationship with your wife?**

I was frightened that losing that part of our very intimate relationship together could lead to a breakdown in our relationship. And I expressed that to Nola, and we talked through the process, and very luckily, she was very supportive, and helped me along the whole way.

**Grab F**

**Can you reflect on the challenges of surviving prostate cancer and then developing ED?**

On the one hand, you're worried about your survival as a man, and on the other hand, you're also worried about your physical ability to function by having erectile dysfunction. And when you combine the two of those, they compound the effect on your mental health, and the anxiety levels just crank up.

Grab G

Why have you chosen to share your story of living with ED?

I've chosen to share my story with the community of living with ED because I think it's vitally important that men understand that there's help out there, and there are people who have been through exactly the same things as what they're going through. If you can talk to someone, and share that knowledge and experience with them, it's a game changer. It really is.



**Peter, 64,  
Business Consultant, father and  
grandfather who developed ED after a  
traumatic sporting injury, *BRISBANE***



**Grab A**

What events led to your diagnosis of erectile dysfunction or ED?

I'd always prided myself of being a great cricketer, but apparently I wasn't because I was involved in a traumatic injury in around 1997 where the inevitable happened when you're playing cricket and I got some severe damage which led to erectile dysfunction.

**Grab B**

For how long do you suspect you had been living with ED before your diagnosis?

I think I was suffering from ED at various levels for probably five years before the formal diagnosis came.

**Grab C**

How challenging was it to discuss your ED symptoms with your partner at the time?

I think one of the things that the challenges to partners when you've got someone who's suffering from ED is that we might be feeling sad and sorry for ourselves, but you got to feel for the partners that they're going through hell as well. They're watching their partner with anxiety, with depression, with all kinds of problems, and they're saying, am I not adequate? Is there something wrong with me? And so I was very fortunate that I had a partner who understood and could give empathy and came on the journey with me.

**Grab D**

How does it feel to live with ED?

I don't think anyone can truly understand the effects of living with ED. The anxiety, the depression, the challenges, the feelings of low self-worth, the feelings, I'm not good enough. The feelings of why this happened to me can really drive you crazy. You feel so inadequate, and you wonder, is there actually a light at the end of this tunnel?

**Grab E**

Can you reflect on the new Australian research revealing many Australian men living with ED are suffering in silence?

There is some amazing research around that doesn't surprise me, that shows that so many Australian men are suffering in silence, and they don't need to. There's so much good advice out there. There's so many solutions that are available out there. All you need to do is put your hand up.

**Grab F**

Around 2 in 5 men (43%) living with ED report the condition has compromised their mental health. What are your thoughts on this?

Some research I've read recently says that around two out of five Australian men are suffering with some terrible and debilitating mental trauma as a result of their ED – anxiety, depression, feelings of not being up to life, relationship challenges, and it's so sad that's two in five are going through those challenges, and that can be absolute hell.

Grab G

Men living with ED describe their experience as “frustrating, embarrassing and confidence-robbing”. What are your thoughts on this?

If you've been suffering with ED, you'll be going through challenges of confidence and self-doubt and frustration. All of those things are there, and it's really, really hard to get through those challenges. But if you don't address those things, they will just get worse. And so do yourself a favour. Do your partner a favour. Do the rest of your life a favour and seek some medical help because there is a solution for you. You just have to ask.

Grab H

Why have you chosen to share your story of living with ED?

Being public, sharing my story absolutely comes with some challenges. But if one Australian man listens to me and takes my advice and does some research and reaches out to a health professional who specialises in solutions for men with ED, if one Aussie male does something about it and changes their lives, I'm a happy man.

*ends#*

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