

## Erectile Dysfunction Predicts Heart Disease

I fully realize this is a website for women (empowHER) however, as a physician I know men are less likely to see a doctor and this is important. It turns out erectile dysfunction is a powerful indicator of [heart disease](#) such as [heart attack](#) and [stroke](#).

Erectile dysfunction affects women too (they are often on the other end of the...stick) and it's important to understand that some 18 million men are affected. If your man is having a difficult time achieving or maintaining an erection during sexual intercourse, he needs to see a healthcare provider as he has a 40 percent increased risk for heart problems.

Make sure he has his [blood pressure](#) checked and a fasting lipid panel (cholesterol) and glucose test.

In order to create an erection, a man's hormones, [muscles](#), blood vessels, and nerves must work synergistically together. The nerves signal down to the penis causing the [muscles](#) to relax so that blood can flow down and fill up causing a stiff erection.

If he has [high cholesterol](#), then the vessels can fill with plaque limiting the erection. Elevated blood sugar also clogs the blood vessel. Other affecting factors include [high blood pressure](#), alcohol, smoking, [obesity](#), poor diet, nerve damage, certain medications and stress.

What can you do?

This can be a difficult topic to discuss however it is important that he sees a healthcare provider. Changing to a healthier lifestyle that includes significantly less fat and sugar while increasing whole grains and vegetables can be helpful. Routine exercise and weight loss also improves circulation and lowers risk factors. Make sure he doesn't just 'pop the little blue pill' and instead gets a thorough work-up.

References:

Araujo A, et al. Does Erectile Dysfunction Contribute to Cardiovascular Disease Risk Prediction Beyond the Framingham Risk Score. J Am Coll Cardiol, 2010; 55:350-356

<http://www.empowher.com/news/herarticle/2010/01/28/erectile-dysfunction-predicts-heart-disease>