The tiny tube that helps men beat impotence

By Pat Hagan
Last updated at 8:28 AM on 03rd November 2009

- Comments (0)
- Add to My Stories

Restricted flow to the male genitals is one of the factors in impotence

A tiny metal tube implanted in the pelvis could transform the love lives of men who suffer erection problems.

The device, not much bigger than a grain of rice, works by propping open the artery that supplies blood to the genitals.

Restricted blood flow to the male sex organs is thought to be a major factor in impotence, or erectile dysfunction.

British doctors hope to carry out the first such implant within the next few months as part of a trial involving up to 30 men. A separate trial is also planned in the U.S.

Surgeons will insert a tube-like device called a stent to try to solve the problem.

Stents resemble miniature metal 'cages' and are already widely used in the treatment of heart disease, where blood vessels feeding the heart have narrowed because of a build-up of fatty deposits.
Their success in restoring-blood flow to and from the heart has prompted researchers to investigate whether they might also benefit men who struggle to get an erection even with drugs such as Viagra.
Although Viagra and similar medications, such as Cialis and Levitra, have transformed the treatment of impotence in the past ten years, around 30 per cent of men who take them see no improvement.
For these men, the only other options are to inject drugs straight into the penis, or use a pump that manually increases blood supply to the organ. Neither is very popular.
It's estimated that half of men over the age of 40 suffer impotence problems from time to time.
Potential causes range from diabetes and hormonal problems to stress and depression. But, in recent years, medical attention has focused on the link with heart disease.

More...

- It's not just women who suffer from bloating... men's habits make them just as prone

Just as the heart needs a constant and healthy supply of blood, a man's genitals also need to be able to call on a substantial rush of blood during arousal.
Recent evidence suggests blood vessels in the pelvic region can become diseased through poor diet, smoking and lack of exercise, in much the same way as coronary arteries.
Indeed, some cardiologists believe erectile problems are a powerful early sign of hidden heart disease, giving up to three years' warning before any other symptoms emerge.

Erectile problems may be an indicator of hidden heart disease (Posed by models)
Now Medtronic Inc., one of the world's biggest medical device firms, has started a stent trial in the U.S. involving 50 men with erectile dysfunction who failed to respond to drugs.
At the same time, a team at the University Hospital of Wales, in Cardiff, is setting up a similar project.
Each man will initially be scanned to check for signs of blockages in blood vessels in the pelvic region.
One of the main targets is the iliac artery, which branches off in different directions to transport blood to the lower half of the body.

Once the problem area has been identified, doctors will insert a thin catheter into the artery until the tip has reached the blocked area.
On the end of the catheter is the stent, which has been collapsed down to make it easier to manoeuvre. When it's in position, a tiny balloon is inflated which makes the stent expand until it is wedged into place. The balloon is then withdrawn.
But there can be problems with so-called 'bare metal' stents. These can cause the body's healing mechanism to over-react, triggering a build-up of scar tissue that simply blocks the blood supply again.
To get round this, the trials will use newer generation drug-eluting stents. These release a medicine that dampens down the rapid healing process and keeps blood vessels open.
Julian Halcox, professor of cardiology at Cardiff University, and a member of the British research team, says the principles behind using stents for erection problems are exactly the same as in heart disease.
'The only difference is that the blood vessels might be a little smaller than coronary arteries,' he says.

Read more: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1224800/The-tiny-tube-helps-men-beat-impotence.html#ixzz0XA94ZwEd
http://www.dailymail.co.uk/health/article-1224800/The-tiny-tube-helps-men-beat-impotence.html