

**Question: Is there something better to use than one of the popular erectile dysfunction medications?**

**Answer:** *Better* may not be the best word to use here. However, there ARE alternatives. The first question that should probably be asked is, "What caused the problem in the first place?" There are good reasons to use Western medications for this. But, like any prescription drug, these medications should not be used with a cavalier attitude.

Many things can cause erectile dysfunction, or impotence. According to MedlinePlus (a web site of the National Library of Medicine), diabetes, high blood pressure, heart conditions, thyroid problems, poor circulation, depression, nerve damage, some prescription medications, alcohol, cocaine, and many other factors can contribute to the problem. Among my patients, one of the most common causes stems from exhaustion. Obviously, simply taking a medication that creates an erection without addressing the possible underlying causes would go against the principles of Traditional Chinese Medicine. We would like to think that it also goes against the principles of conventional Western medicine. However, many Western physicians are under pressure from managed care, as well as from patients, who are encouraged to self-diagnose and self-prescribe by advertisements on television, radio, and in the print media. Prescribing a pill may often seem the easiest thing to do. We certainly have seen evidence of this in the history of over-prescription of antibiotics, a practice now opposed by the National Institutes of Health.

What are some things you can do to try to help yourself, before resorting to medications? Again, from MedlinePlus, self-care measures include getting plenty of rest; reducing or eliminating your use of alcohol, cigarettes, or illegal drugs; exercise and eat a healthy diet to maintain good circulation; and speak with your partner openly about sex (which can help reduce psychological pressure). If you are depressed, or think you may be depressed, consider counseling. Of all of these options, getting more rest is probably the easiest thing to do, and is frequently the most neglected.

You'll probably agree that the list of possible options before taking a medication is fairly extensive. And you may also want to consider the natural cycle of aging. As we get older, achieving and maintaining erections may require more stimulation; that's natural. But age alone should not prevent an erection.

If your self-care measures do not work, you should at least consider speaking with your doctor about other options before trying a medication. It is possible that adjusting the way you take one of your current prescriptions may help you, without adding a new one. Or, there may be other underlying problems which could be corrected. From the point of view of Traditional Chinese Medicine, this issue frequently arises from a kidney deficiency. A combination of Acupuncture and herbs can help bolster your kidney energies, and this may be another good alternative. But your self-care measures, as always, should come first.

**Question: Are there alternatives to the popular erectile dysfunction medications (PART 2)?**

**Answer:** Last month, we discussed some of the options available to you if you are having trouble with erectile dysfunction, or impotence. Whether it is an occasional problem or a chronic problem, you have a lot of possible choices open to you before you resort to a prescription drug. This month, we will talk a little about the Traditional Chinese Medical approach to this issue.

If you have read this column before, you probably already know that being "natural" doesn't necessarily mean that a substance or treatment is safe OR effective! However, within the framework of a consistent medical system, like Traditional Chinese Medicine, you CAN find some natural alternatives that could address the underlying cause of impotence. It is important always to use such methods within the framework for which they were designed, or undesirable and even unpleasant results might occur.

A Yang deficiency is the most common cause of erectile dysfunction. This can also cause a decrease in the sex drive of women. More specifically, it is usually a deficiency of the Kidney Yang. This may be congenital, but in most cases, it is an acquired deficiency from lifestyle choices. Sometimes, this may include a history of excessive sex, insufficient sleep, poor diet, overwork, stress, and even excessive fear. While counseling to address lifestyle will necessarily be the first step of treatment, your physician will also likely prescribe some other treatments, too.

Acupuncture typically treats a Kidney Yang deficiency with points on the Kidney meridian on the ankles; points on the Urinary Bladder meridian on the lower back; and points on the Ren, or Conception, meridian on the lower abdomen, below the navel. While traditionally we needle these points, they may also be stimulated with heat. In the clinical setting, moxa (ai ye, or mugwort) may be burned near the acupuncture points or on the ends of the needles. At home, you might be instructed to apply a heating pad to certain of these points.

Any number of different herbs might be prescribed to stimulate the Kidney Yang, with the most typical formula being Jin Gui Shen Qi Tang. A note of caution before you run to the internet to order this as a

substitute for a prescription E.D. drug: it is possible that your problem is NOT a kidney yang deficiency, and taking this herbal formula could easily result in insomnia, irritability, and possibly even increased blood pressure and further trouble with impotence! This is why you should only take herbs under the direction of a qualified practitioner.

Qi gong exercises might well be prescribed to assist in building your Kidney energy, too. Qi gong exercises are usually slow or even still exercises tied to your breathing, with specific postures and movements, depending on what you are trying to accomplish. We highly recommend these exercises.

If E.D. affects you, why not try some of these other options instead of simply taking a drug?