

DIFFICULTY WITH ERECTIONS

Q: I'm having a problem with erection. How do I know if it's a physical problem, and I should see a physician, or a psychological one, and I should see a psychotherapist?

A: You've given me very little information, but I can give you some general guidelines which other readers may find helpful as well.

As a rule, it's always a good idea to check with your physician first. Your doctor will ask a bunch of questions, perform a medical exam and perhaps take a few tests (ie., bloodwork). This will help rule out physical causality. An important question to ask yourself is whether you get erections under any circumstances (through masturbation or with specific partners, for example). If you do, then it is unlikely you have a physical problem.

There are some exceptions, however. Some physical conditions can cause temporary erection problems, for example, the early stages of diabetes or atherosclerosis. (Late stages of these conditions often cause chronic erectile failure). The use of alcohol and other central nervous system depressants, including certain recreational drugs and some allergy medications, can also cause temporary erection difficulties.

Assuming none of the physical conditions are impinging on your ability to get an erection, you would need to look at the circumstances under which you experience erectile failure. Is it with a specific person; are you especially stressed; are you overconcerned with pleasing your partner; are there times when you worry about whether your erection will work? If so, a psychotherapist trained in sex therapy can be very helpful in resolving the problem. The therapist will help you figure out what you are doing, or not doing, to contribute to the problem as well as exercises to help you have a more reliable erection.