Vacuum erection assistance devices: frequently-asked questions

What are vacuum-erection assistance devices?
Vacuum therapy is a non-invasive method of obtaining and sustaining an erection in men with impotence (erectile dysfunction). An erection is obtained by inducing a negative pressure with a hand- or battery-operated pump. To use this device, the penis is inserted into a cylinder with plenty of lubrication being used to provide a seal at the base of the penis.

How do they work?
Activation of the vacuum device removes air from the cylinder. This is accomplished using either a small electric motor or a hand-operated pump. The negative pressure produced encourages blood to flow into the penis, thus causing an erection. A constriction ring is then slipped around the base of the penis to hold blood in and to maintain the erection.

How long are they effective?
It may take up to 7 minutes to obtain a full erection using the vacuum device but, once an erection has been obtained, the cylinder is removed and the constriction ring maintains the erection. The constriction ring should not be left in place for more than 30 minutes to prevent bruising or discoloration of the penis. Some patients find this process rather mechanical and it can make the penis feel “cold”. The constriction ring can, sometimes, be slightly uncomfortable.
and about 60% of men experience some difficulty with ejaculation since the constriction ring stops the flow of semen; this causes no harm although it may be slightly uncomfortable at the time of climax.

Approximately 70% of men are able to obtain an erection using this method but are sometimes put off by the expense; the pumps cost between £120 and £300, and are available on the NHS (under schedule).

**Schedule 11 restrictions – only patients suffering from the conditions below are eligible for NHS prescription**

- Diabetes mellitus
- Injury (spinal cord or pelvis)
- Multiple sclerosis
- Poliomyelitis
- Prostate cancer
- Psychological distress (severe)
- Renal failure
- Single-gene neurological disorders
- Spina bifida
- Surgery (prostatectomy & radical pelvic surgery)

**Who can I contact for more help or information?**

**Oncology Nurses**

- Uro-Oncology Nurse Specialist
  01223 586748
- Bladder cancer Nurse Practitioner (haematuria, chemotherapy & BCG)
  01223 274608
- Prostate cancer Nurse Practitioner
  01223 274608

**Non-Oncology Nurses**

- Urology Nurse Practitioner (incontinence, urodynamics, catheter patients)
  01223 274608 or 586748
Patient Advice & Liaison Centre (PALS)

- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 216756 or 257257
  +44 (0)1223 274432 or 274431
- PatientLine
  *801 (from patient bedside telephones only)
- E mail
  pals@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
- Mail
  PALS, Box No 53
  Addenbrooke's Hospital
  Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

Chaplaincy and Multi-Faith Community

- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 217769
- E mail
  derek.fraser@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
- Mail
  The Chaplaincy, Box No 105
  Addenbrooke's Hospital
  Hills Road, Cambridge, CB2 2QQ

MINICOM System ("type" system for the hard of hearing)

- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 274604

Access Office (travel, parking & security information)

- Telephone
  +44 (0)1223 586969

Other information

This patient information leaflet provides input from specialists, the British Association of Urological Surgeons, the Department of Health and evidence-based sources as a supplement to any advice you may already have been given by your GP. Alternative treatments can be discussed in more detail with your urologist or Specialist Nurse.

How can I get information in alternative formats?

Please ask if you require this information in other languages, large print or audio format: 01223 216032 or patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk

Polish

Informacje te można otrzymać w innych językach, w wersji dużym drukiem lub audio. Zamówienia prosimy składać pod numerem: 01223 216032 lub wysyłając e-mail: patient.information@addenbrookes.nhs.uk
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