

Sexuality and Aging With Traditional Chinese Medicine

By Virginia Pham, MS, AP

Until recently, men have had to hide their sexual problems behind closed doors. Sexual impotence, or erectile dysfunction, is an inability to maintain an erection during intercourse. The drug company Pfizer's production of Viagra has exposed the problem and opened the door to more men making the call for help. Urologists have dealt with this health condition in a number of ways, and Viagra is only one of them. Viagra is taken about an hour before intercourse. An erection is maintained through the ability of blood flow and smooth muscle in the *corporous cavernosa* of the penis.

While men suffer from erectile dysfunction in all age groups, 15 percent to 25 percent of men over 65 will experience this condition. Erectile dysfunction is not associated with aging, and is commonly a complication of chronic disease, psychoemotional issues or surgery.

Though early Taoists discovered longevity through sexual virility and stamina, the regimen often included herbal medicine and meditation. Through these practices, maintaining vitality meant conserving the life-force energy through the aging process. As Mantak Chia describes the principle, "• a young and healthy person earns 100 percent of his required energy from eating, resting and exercise, and spends approximately 60-70 percent maintaining his daily life • as he ages, he gradually earns less and less (energy), even though his body requires the same expenditures, and he starts to overdraw his account by drawing energy from his vital organs •."

Patients who experience erectile dysfunction may do so as a secondary cause of their life-force energy being consumed through chronic disease. Chronic diseases such as diabetes, prostate cancer, anxiety, and side-effects of medication, will often lead to further complications for the patient in later years.

Traditional Chinese medicine can have a positive effect in guiding a patient through the process of prevention by reducing medication and increasing and maintaining health awareness. By using the proper

diagnosis for the individual, then applying the appropriate herbal formulation, i.e. tonifying kidney yang or moving *qi* stagnation, a wide variety of outcomes are possible.

In one study of Korean ginseng vs. antidepressants, research showed men with erectile dysfunction made improvements of 60% using ginseng, while only 30% improved with antidepressants. *Ren shen* has been shown to be effective in other research studies also.

Older adults and geriatric patients can benefit by using acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine, and including meditation exercises that will help balance the circulation of the whole body. Not only does it become significant to the matter at hand, it contributes to the long-term holistics aspect of healthy aging and disease prevention.

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