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Reference: **BH/PIN/824**

Publication date: July 2018

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Patient information

Understanding rapid ejaculation or premature ejaculation



Introduction

Rapid Ejaculation (RE) occurs when a man experiences an orgasm and ejaculates semen soon after sexual activity starts, with minimal stimulation to his penis. It is not a medical condition. An occasional occurrence of RE is to be expected at any point in time for most men. However, it becomes a sexual difficulty when psychological and relational issues begin to play an influential role in maintaining it. RE can become a cause of great distress to men and their sexual partners.

RE is very common. Approximately 1 in 3 men will experience it at some point in their lives. For some men, RE occurs occasionally (e.g., when meeting a new partner, after a long period of abstinence). However, for others it might become a chronic difficulty, which could warrant professional support.

Understanding sexual arousal: Arousal cycle

A simple but adequate description of sexual arousal is a 4-phase process:

1. Sexual Excitement: breathing deepens and erection begins;
2. Plateau: erection becomes full and you feel highly aroused, sensations are amplified;
3. Orgasm: a rapid built up of arousal that most often leads to ejaculation; and
4. Resolution: breathing returns to normal and erection subsides.

In RE, the 'excitement' and 'plateau' phases often last for just a few seconds before a man reaches what is known as "point of no return" (marked as a red 'x' above). At this point, arousal is so high that an orgasm with ejaculation is inevitable. Addressing RE involves identifying and understanding the factors that increase arousal. It also involves learning how to monitor and regulate arousal so the phases of 'excitement' and 'plateau' can last longer.

Useful resources

Leaflets

- Male Mindful Self Practice
- Kegel exercises for men
- Sensate focus

Online materials

- NHS Choices <http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/ejaculation-problems/pages/introduction.aspx>
- 'Last longer' app developed by Qapps.

Books

- *Coping with erectile dysfunction* by Metz and McCarthy
- *The new male sexuality* by Zilbergeld
- *The relate guide to sex in loving relationship* by Vermillion
- *The massage secrets for lovers* by Stanway

2. Kegel exercises

Kegel or pelvic floor exercises can also be beneficial in managing RE. These are exercises that help to build awareness of your pelvic area and strengthen some of the muscle groups that are involved in orgasm and ejaculation.

3. Taking the pressure off

There are way too many myths and cultural expectations about what is 'normal' in sex. They are not always accurate or helpful. Talking with your sexual partner about the kind of sex you both like is important. Sexual communication and negotiation can help reduce performance anxiety or feelings of guilt, blame or shame. Feeling criticised by your partner or being critical of yourself will often exacerbate sexual difficulties. Be aware that enjoyable and pleasurable sex is more than penetrative intercourse with mutual orgasms. Focus on developing a wide repertoire of ways of being physical, sensual and sexual with each other, such as touching, stroking, oral sex, mutual masturbation.

4. Sensate focus

Removing the pressure to perform by focussing on pleasure and sexual communication may require some patience with practice. Some clinicians recommend avoiding intercourse for a short time and sharing other forms of physical pleasure and affection instead. Connecting in this way can help you to re-establish a satisfying physical bond and emotional intimacy with your sexual partner. Sensate focus or sensual massage can help you and your sexual partner to develop a more pleasurable and satisfying sexual life with each other.

If these self-management approaches don't help, then working with a psychologist or psychosexual counsellor may be appropriate. Medication, psychological input, couple counselling or individual therapy can improve sex and for many people; a combination of treatment methods sometimes works best.

Rapid ejaculation: Causes

There is no single cause for RE. It usually is a combination of emotional, relational, social and/or physical factors that play a key role. Below is a brief list of common factors that "arouse" the nervous system and can contribute to RE.

Social-Cultural

Most men have little education about their bodies and how they work when sexually aroused. We are often bombarded with unrealistic expectations about our sexual performance, often fueled by pornography. The combination of a lack of education with unrealistic expectations can create a lot of tension and frustration that will only increase the likelihood of RE.

Relational

A number of relational factors can influence RE. Having sex with a new partner, wanting to please or perform for another person, losing the focus of your own body, being criticised by your current (or previous) partners about RE will increase your anxiety about it. The impact of these relational factors can make it difficult to understand or regulate your arousal.

Emotional

Quite often, men will focus on their penises and the physiology of sex while ignoring its relational and emotional components. Underlying anxiety or worry about the recurrence of RE will probably perpetuate and maintain it. Disappointment in losing a partner (or the fear of this happening) with feelings of hopelessness and frustration will only increase tension and make it worse. These kinds of emotional reactions to RE will only serve to maintain it as a chronic experience.

Physical

In media, male sexuality is often portrayed as physically rigorous and intense. However, sexual performance and enjoyment is a combination of physical comfort and relaxation that allows our body

to experience sexual excitement without becoming overwhelmed.

“Calm sex” might sound like a contradiction of terms. In reality, however, physical comfort and emotional calmness are very important to understanding and regulating our sexual arousal. It is highly unlikely to experience pleasure or develop a new skill when you are stressed out, tense, and afraid of your own body.

Learning how your body works, understanding your arousal, and communicating effectively with your partner during sex are important. It may take time to be able to develop your understanding and skills to manage your arousal without judging yourself or being distracted by worrying thoughts.

Note: there is some evidence that RE might have a genetic or hereditary component. But this has not been established or supported by the mainstream scientific community. While it may be true that some people are taller than you or might run faster than you because of their genes, this doesn't mean that you cannot learn to enjoy playing basketball or running. Enjoyment and satisfaction with an activity does not require being perfect – or the best at something.

Managing rapid ejaculation: Lasting longer

Often men ask how long they should last (before experiencing an orgasm). What makes a pleasurable and fulfilling sexual experience varies dramatically among individuals and situations. Therefore, it is difficult to offer a single and simple answer. Like with food - where culture, identity, personal preferences, habits and individual needs intertwine, a single size portion of the same for everyone would be unrealistic.

Developing an understanding of how your body works when sexually aroused and being able to regulate this experience requires patience.

When a problem is upsetting or embarrassing, we may want to ignore or avoid it and hope it goes away. A common piece of advice may be to “think of something else” but this isn't particularly helpful or effective. Attempting to ignore anxieties about ejaculation or distracting yourself (e.g. by thinking about football during sex) means you have less awareness and control over your arousal (a bit like trying to drive a car while watching a movie at the same time).

Some of this may involve learning new skills or changing expectations about sex. Just like learning any new skill (eg. playing the guitar), practice, patience and building your confidence are all important.

1. Building awareness of arousal

When you become sexually aroused with an erect penis, focus on your sensations. Notice and label those sensations. Noticing and rating your arousal levels (0-10-20-30, etc) can give you better control over your sexual function. Like driving a car that can go very fast, being aware of subtle changes and increases in arousal is helpful. Gaining confidence and control through varying positions, pace and posture can also help. Some men also find the stop-start technique, or mindful masturbation helpful for developing better control.