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# EXPLODING SOME MALE MYTHS

## SIZE DOESN'T MATTER. PERIOD. AND THOSE LITTLE BLUE PILLS HAVE A DOWNSIDE

I've never liked the word "impotence." I've always found it to be somewhat demeaning. I suspect I'd like it even less if I were a man! "Frigidity," an equally pejorative term, has (fortunately) fallen into disfavor. Impotence, unlike the more politically correct "ED" is much more than a failure in penile tumescence — it conveys a lack of competence, virility, adequacy, strength and power.

When I treat men who have been diagnosed with various illnesses, including diabetes or prostate cancer, their concern about "impotence" is at the top of their list. I see many patients who stop taking their prescribed antidepressant or antihypertensive medications or hormones because of sexual side effects.



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"What's the point of feeling better physically if I won't be able to function sexually?" they ask. (There are medications with a lower incidence of sexual side effects. This is something you should discuss with your doctor.)

I don't know why men hold onto the pervasive belief that they are the embodiment of their erections — this despite women's unsuccessful efforts to convince them that they're infinitely more. Countless men have said to me,

"Without an erection I just don't feel like a man." Men don't usually tell me they have impotence — they say they are impotent.

"Steven," 44, who owns his own business, is thinking about reentering the dating world. He finds himself in a situation he thought would never happen to him — "divorced and impotent." He told me about the devastating end to his 16-year marriage, the discovery of his wife's affair, and the greatest pain of all — having to make an appointment to visit with his three

young children. (He proudly reached into his wallet to share the photos with me — beautiful smiling faces.)

"This is killing me," he said. "I wish we could have worked it out," face floundering and feet tapping nervously. He continues in a kind of confessional style, "I was never a very good lover. I know the marriage wouldn't have gone down the drain if I just wasn't impotent!" Steven blamed his wife's affair and the demise of the entire marriage on his one problem. He wasn't ready to hear that marital failure is rarely one-sided.

It's not unusual for separated or divorced men (and women) to call me in a panic. They fear repeating the same behaviors in the next relationship — and they often do.

Being consumed by worries about potency or performance frequently creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. In Steven's case, he'd watch whether he was getting erect and then anxiously worry about ejaculating too soon. He was unaware that his wife may have felt disconnected and alone during much of their lovemaking. He was so worried about his erection he was out of touch with his pleasure.

Understanding that arousal is more than erection is critical to sexual enjoyment. It's not just semantics or parsing words. Sexual arousal is a head-to-toe experience and involves the body, mind and relationship. You don't just get turned on in your genitals. As you stay comfortably focused on what you're enjoying, excitement intensifies. However, if both partners are secretly watching the penis to see if and when it becomes alert — perky — peppy — ready — the action usually comes to a screeching halt.

Does this scenario sound familiar? At some point in your intimate touching, you begin to think about intercourse. He surreptitiously reaches down to feel how "it's" doing. She then casually brushes her hand across "it" to see if "it's" ready. No one shares this little dance, but both partners know that it's going on. Will it or won't it? All action hinges on whether this organ of passion will rise tonight.

How can it possibly stand under the weight of

so much scrutiny? With all of this anxious watching (Masters and Johnson called this "spectatoring"), no one's having much fun. Couples who have this kind of sex soon start avoiding it. They'd rather get a video, order a pizza, and forget the whole thing!

And while we're on the subject of performance, let's explode another myth — bigger isn't necessarily better. Remember high school and the group showers after gym? Many males describe feeling short-changed in the "size" department as they glanced at others in the locker room. I've had men tell me that they stopped playing sports for that reason alone! I suggest that while in the shower, they were probably looking at a foreshortened view of their own penis in comparison with a frontal view of their buddies, but that perspective offers little consolation. They want a bigger penis. They refuse to be comforted by the fact that an average non-erect penis is between 3 and 4 inches long. They've obviously seen too many porn movies to believe me.

Well, I have a little secret to share with you; it's the rare female who's complained to me about her partner's penis being too small. I could literally count them on one hand (no pun intended). Many women do complain, however, that they feel unappreciated, unattended to, unloved, etc. You can't make your penis longer, guys, but you can become an extraordinary lover!

Let's not fail to mention Viagra and other Viagra-esque substances. With all of its undisputed benefits, Viagra (and its pharmacologic cousins) has promoted the potential for an ageless organ of sexual perfection. Unfortunately the pill doesn't do a thing to improve intimacy, per se. If you've forgotten how to talk, listen and share personally — no little blue (or other colored) pill will make your bells ring and your heart sing.

There are tons of myths that fuel feelings of sexual inadequacy in males and females (more about women in my next column). It's as if there's a sexual underground that disseminates the truth about sexuality for men — written and

promulgated by men — designed to make men feel they're just not making the grade. (It's not fair to them.)

Men are not impotent and women are not frigid; we're just individuals with sexual concerns and, at times, distress. Although erections contribute to sexual satisfaction, they're not synonymous with sexual satisfaction. Let's give ourselves a break and appreciate our uniqueness. We're much more than the sum total of our body parts. Enjoy!

### To Ask A Question ...

Many people find that their intimate relationships and sexual health are difficult to discuss.

Please think of this as a safe place to have those concerns addressed.

Write to me in confidence at [AskDrScantling@aol.com](mailto:AskDrScantling@aol.com).

Feel free to ask me whatever is on your mind regarding sexual wellness, health, intimacy and relationship — mind, body or spirit. While the large volume of e-mail I receive makes answering every letter impossible, your questions will help me choose the subjects most important to NE Magazine readers. I will also print responses to readers' inquiries from time to time.

So regardless of your age, whether you're newly engaged, divorced or widowed, managing cancer or some other illness, struggling with fertility, or just trying to make the most out of your relationship — let's talk.

*This content is to be considered informational in nature and is not intended as a substitute for professional, medical, or psychological advice, diagnosis or treatment. In order to maintain patient confidentiality, the cases described here under fictional names are amalgams of several individuals.*

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