

Ayurveda and Virility

by Shannon Mooney

Since ancient times, men throughout the world have been searching for aphrodisiacs to enhance their virility. Sexual energy is very powerful. Aside from herbs, diet, lifestyle and yoga, using discrimination in choosing a sexual partner also plays a contributing role in good sexual health. Ayurveda teaches that conditions must be right and that mutual pleasure is necessary for both partners to have a satisfying sexual experience. In famed ancient Ayurvedic text Charaka Samhita, the author explains that one of the best aphrodisiacs for man is a partner who loves him.

According to Ayurveda, sex is the third pillar of Life, the first two being diet and sleep. These form the foundation on which to build a life of health and longevity. The attitude you hold toward sex should be one of respect and discipline in order to reflect good health. Ayurveda understands the act of sex as a powerful use of creative energy. Without proper discipline, sex can exhaust and deplete the body of ojas, the vital essence or "juice" of the body, resulting in a negative effect on overall health.

Virility is described as a man's ability to successfully engage in the act of copulation. This includes having healthy and plentiful sperm and the ability to attain and maintain an erection to allow for satisfactory sexual intercourse. Though there are numerous disorders of the male reproductive system including infertility, premature ejaculation, loss of libido, and inability to achieve orgasm to name a few, erectile dysfunction continues to be the most common complaint related to male sexual health.

According to researchers from the National Institute of Health (NIH), it is estimated that ten to twenty million American men experience some degree of erectile dysfunction. Causes of erectile dysfunction can be both organic and psychological. According to The Impotence Research Center at Boston University, organic or physiological causes include:

- congestive problems in the vascular system such as atherosclerosis, high blood cholesterol, and high blood pressure
- pelvic surgery, pelvic trauma or physical shock
- drugs such as antihistamines, antidepressants, anti-psychotics, tranquilizers
- alcohol and tobacco
- endocrine disorders, diabetes, hypothyroidism
- diseases or trauma to male sex organs, penis or prostate
- neurological diseases

Psychological causes are typically stress, overwork, performance anxiety or fear of rejection, and depression.

To understand these causes in terms of Ayurveda and to determine appropriate therapeutic treatment, it is best to seek the guidance of an Ayurvedic practitioner. Many times, there may be a combination of factors contributing to erectile dysfunction both physical and psychological and the way each factor presents itself within each individual is dependent on individual constitution or

prakriti.

For a general understanding, the causes such as trauma, shock, certain neurological disorders, fear and anxiety are typically vata in nature. Many of the prescription drugs that cause erectile dysfunction, most commonly antacids, antihistamines, and blood pressure medications primarily affect pitta dosha. Alcohol and tobacco primarily cause imbalance to pitta and vata doshas. Generally, all vascular or congestive problems restricting blood flow to the penis, such as diabetes, hypothyroidism, high blood pressure and other obesity related causes are considered kapha-type imbalances.

Ayurveda understands virility as an indication of good health. Though virility tends to naturally decrease as a man gets older, erectile dysfunction is treatable at any age. Healthy men can remain virile into their eighties and beyond. Virilization uses similar therapies and herbs as recommended for rejuvenation of the body. Both virilization and rejuvenation aim to increase ojas. The main difference is that virilization focuses on specifically nourishing the reproductive organs, improving sperm count, and enhancing libido. Supporting sexual health is an integral part of maintaining vitality in the body as a whole. Because the act of sex is ruled by vata dosha, virilization and building sexual health is aimed to calm and nourish the nervous system. With vata dosha in balance, it is generally much easier to maintain balance within the other two doshas. Ayurveda stresses maintaining the health of the reproductive system not only to have a better sex life but to live longer.

Diet

For vata and pitta-type disorders, tonifying and rejuvenating foods are recommended. Special foods that are ojas-enhancing are milk, ghee, almonds, dates, and sesame oil. A vata pacifying may also be useful.

If erectile dysfunction is due to vascular insufficiency (typically kapha-type disorder) there may be a lack of interest in sex (low or no libido). It is imperative to reduce risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as high blood pressure, elevated cholesterol and triglyceride levels, and obesity. Work with a health practitioner and consider a kapha-reducing diet.

In kapha-type imbalances, many times food, particularly sugar and sweets become a substitute for sex. Honey can be used as a healthy sweetener, because of its heating properties and ability to gently scrape fat.

Other recommendations:

- Limit alcohol, particularly before a sexual encounter. Chicago Medical School researchers have found alcohol to decrease the body's ability to produce testosterone. Alcohol also negatively affects sexual function.
- Minimize processed foods, deep fried foods, animal fats and refined sugars. These foods can contribute to arteriosclerosis, restricting the blood supply to the penis and the nerves which govern arousal.
- Minimize smoking and quit if possible. Smoking can damage the small blood vessels in the penis, decreasing sexual capability.

For a delicious tonic after sex, drink a cup of warm milk cooked with dates and ghee, adding saffron and honey. This can help to enhance ojas and rejuvenate the reproductive tissues.

Lifestyle

Sexual activity is most closely associated with vata dosha. One way to safeguard against vata disturbance is to engage in sex at night, since night is ruled by kapha dosha. The qualities of kapha dosha are grounding and stable, balancing the airy, mobile qualities of vata dosha. Limit frequency of sexual activity depending on the season and individual prakriti or constitution. The winter season, one ruled by kapha dosha, is the best season to engage in sexual activity. The summer and fall, seasons, intercourse should be limited in order to prevent vitiation of pitta and vata doshas. In order to preserve ojas, Dr. Vasant Lad, in his book *The Complete Book of Ayurvedic Home Remedies*, suggests love-making once or twice a month for vatas, once every two weeks for pittas and two to three times a week for kaphas. Vatas and pittas are generally more susceptible to the detriments of excessive sexual activity, while kaphas typically have ample ojas and good stamina. The increase in physical activity is very good for them.

Regular exercise is a vital component of a man's overall and sexual health. Aerobic activity in particular is of paramount importance in improving physical fitness for kapha individuals. Increased activity strengthens the body, builds self-esteem, and improves sexual health.

Getting sufficient restful sleep can help the body to renew and restore itself. Sleep is a way to cleanse or digest the previous day's mental activities which could otherwise accumulate and cause toxic buildup or ama. Revitalizing the body with enough good sleep can increase ojas, the necessary ingredient for a healthy sex life.

Yoga

Reclined Cobbler's Pose (Supta Baddha Konasana) can help increase virility by helping to relieve pelvic congestion, relieve congestion in the gonads and lower blood pressure. Locust pose (Sabalabhasana) is an excellent pose to tone pelvic organs and endocrine glands, specifically thyroid, parathyroid, islets of Langerhans and gonads, and help improve disorders of the male reproductive organs.

Practice a couple vata-relieving postures after sex to help fully relax the body and expel excess vata from the pelvis. Knees-to-chest (Apanasana) and restorative posture, legs-up-the wall (Viparitakarani), are both ideal.

Pranayama

Exercising the breath can increase circulation in the body and help to keep the body relaxed and fluid. Improving circulation is very beneficial in cases of vascular obstruction and aids in overall health of the reproductive organs. The relaxation that deep-breathing provides can relieve the stress and anxiety that is many times associated with erectile dysfunction.

Meditation

Meditation can be used during a sexual intercourse to enhance the quality of the experience and increase ojas in the body instead of depleting it.

Erectile dysfunction can lead to psychological disturbances such as anxiety, stress, frustration, depression due to anticipation of failure. Regular practice of meditation can help to relieve stress and balance these common emotions and improve virility.