

## Does Viagra Help Women with Sexual Dysfunction?

Although sexual dysfunction is more commonly talked (and joked) about when it happens in men, it is actually more likely to occur in women. Surveys indicate that 43% of women experience some type of sexual dysfunction. In women, sexual function is a coordinated response involving muscles, blood flow, nerves, hormones, and psychological well-being. Emotional intimacy is a key component of sexual responsiveness for women.

The drug sildenafil (Viagra) is often prescribed for men when they have sexual dysfunction. Sildenafil works in men by increasing blood flow into the penis, which leads to erection. Some experimental studies suggest that a similar response may occur when the drug is used by women—specifically, that sildenafil may increase blood flow in a woman's clitoris to improve sexual satisfaction.

So far, researchers have conducted 12 different studies testing the effects of sildenafil in women diagnosed with various types of sexual function disorders. These studies used doses



ranging from 25 to 100 mg daily. Eight of the studies showed possible improvements in some aspects of sexual function, but no improvements were seen in the other 4 studies.

In one study involving women with sexual dysfunction who had not yet reached menopause, sildenafil improved arousal, orgasm, enjoyment, satisfaction of sexual frequency, and frequency of fantasies. In women who had reached menopause, the drug was associated with improved sexual desire, arousal, lubrication, sensation, orgasm, and less pain. Benefits were reported by women with neurodegenerative diseases known to contribute to sexual dysfunction, such as spinal cord injuries, multiple sclerosis, and diabetes. Women with depression who were taking antidepressant medications—which are known to decrease sexual desire—also reported

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Mayo Clinic

[www.mayoclinic.com/print/female-sexual-dysfunction/  
DS00701/METHOD=print&DSECTION=all](http://www.mayoclinic.com/print/female-sexual-dysfunction/DS00701/METHOD=print&DSECTION=all)

Medline Plus

[www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/femalesexualdysfunction.html](http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/femalesexualdysfunction.html)

Based on "Assessing the Clinical Efficacy of Sildenafil for the Treatment of Female Sexual Dysfunction: by Dana A Brown, Jeffrey A Kyle, and Mary J Ferrill, *The Annals of Pharmacotherapy*, July/August 2009, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1345/aph.1L691>. For Our Patients is provided by *The Annals* to help explain the latest research and information relating to your medications. These summaries are for informational purposes only and are not a substitute for professional advice from your personal medical provider. If you have questions about this material, you should discuss it with your physician or pharmacist. This summary may be reproduced without permission for not-for-profit educational purposes only. Any other use must be approved by the publisher. © Copyright 2009, Harvey Whitney Books Company, [www.hwbooks.com](http://www.hwbooks.com). FOPF9 DOI 10.1345/fop.1L691

benefits. However, not all studies have found sildenafil to be beneficial.

Just as in men, women using sildenafil experienced headache, flushing, stuffy nose, visual changes, and nausea. Additionally, some women reported discomfort or super-sensitive clitoris responses, which caused them to stop using the medication.

So far, there does not seem to be enough evidence to routinely recommend sildenafil for all women with sexual dysfunction. Each study has had serious limitations, such as the enrollment of small numbers of women, or the use of inconsistent definitions of sexual dysfunction, different instruments to measure effects of the drug, or incor-

rect statistical tests to report data. Therefore, the clinical relevance of most studies is difficult to determine. However, sildenafil may be beneficial in certain groups of women, and more studies are needed to determine who might benefit the most.

If you experience sexual dysfunction, you may wish to talk to your doctor about strategies to improve your sexual responses. If you and your doctor decide that you should try sildenafil, be sure to remind your doctor if you take any nitrate-containing drugs for your heart (eg, nitroglycerin, isosorbide). These medicines can be very dangerous to use with sildenafil because the combination of drugs could cause your blood pressure to fall too low.