

Erectile Dysfunction and the Internet - An unwanted bonus with SEX PILLS?



Despite the advancement in prostate cancer treatments, one of the side effects many men experience is erectile dysfunction. These include penile stimulants (oral medication), vacuum devices, and penile prostheses. There have been a rise in the number of internet website that advertises products that are '100% natural' and that they guarantee 'rock hard erections' or that it 'lasts 4 hours' or more! These claims sound extremely attractive, but it is important that you regard these advertisements with caution as they can be misleading and even potentially dangerous. Here is one example of a product advertised on the internet that claim to 'cure' erectile dysfunction. (For a more detailed listing of other products, please refer to ED Herbal Products and Claims sheet on our website www.prostatecentre.com)

Name of Product: ViaDrene

Website: <http://www.viadrene.com/index.html#ordering>
Claims:

- Restore your ability to achieve full, healthy erections.
- Raise your arousal levels and general sexual energy.
- Reduce anxiety caused by performance failure.
- Increase the size of the erect penis.
- Lengthen the duration of your erection, providing more pleasure for your partner.
- Help to produce thicker, denser sperm.
- No side effects, guaranteed.
- 90 days money back guarantee

Precautions/Warnings:

- FDA Required Disclaimer: The statements and products shown on this website have not been evaluated by the US Food and Drug Administration. These products are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure, or prevent any disease. Those seeking treatment for a specific condition or disease should consult a qualified physician or health advisor prior to using our products if possible. This product should be taken as part of a healthy lifestyle. All of the testimonial statements are genuine and have been edited to save space. Individual results of this product will vary. □
- ViaDrene™ is absolutely safe for people on heart medications, but be sure to consult with your health practitioner before adding any medication to your daily regime. □
- ViaDrene™ is a good supplement for men with prostate issues. If you have ever had prostate cancer, check with your health advisor before taking anything new.

Another thing to consider is how reliable the information is on the websites. The bold claims are meant to draw you in, but how much truth is there? Below are just a few examples of the ingredients some companies use in their product, what they claim it does, and what the evidence shows. (For a more exhaustive list, please refer to ED Herbal Products and Claims sheet on our website www.prostatecentre.com)

Herb	Claims	Evidence
<p>Ashwagandha (<i>withania somnifera</i>)</p> <p>AKA</p> <p>Indian Ginseng. (root and berry of the plant)</p>	<p>“Has been used as an aphrodisiac for centuries to increase sexual vitality.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May benefit osteoarthritis, promote growth in children and improve hemoglobin concentration, red blood cell count and <i>sexual performance in adults</i> • May be used for stress, strain, fatigue, pain, skin diseases, diabetes, gastrointestinal disease, rheumatoid arthritis, epilepsy, to increase energy and improve health and longevity, and prevent low white blood cell count (from chemotherapy) • Consumption with alcohol, other drugs or natural health products with sedative properties is not recommended • May induce abortion.
<p>Epimedium sagittatum/ Epimedium grandiflorum</p> <p>AKA</p> <p>Horny Goat Weed, Yin Yang Huo, Inyokaku, Herba Epimedii</p>	<p>“Natural sexual stimulators that encourage performance and testosterone production”</p> <p>“Contains the active compound icariin, which inhibits the activity of PDE-5, the same thing that makes Viagra™ work, except instead of a synthetic, it is 100% natural and has been used for centuries to combat male impotence. “</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Used to treat fatigue, arthritic and nerve pain, and <i>sexual dysfunction</i> by traditional Chinese medicine. • May have neuroprotective, immunomodulatory, anticancer and anti-HIV activity (in vitro), and prevent bone loss in postmenopausal women. • Patients with hormone-sensitive cancers is advised to avoid Epimedium as it may have estrogenic effects. • One patient who had cardiovascular disease reported tachyarrhythmia and hypomania from oral intake
<p>Yohimbe bark extract and certain of its derivatives</p>	<p>have been shown in human studies to be effective in the treatment of male impotence, much of the research being done in the United States by the National Institute of Health.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • used mainly as an aphrodisiac. • Marketed as a steroid substitute • clinical studies to treat sexual dysfunction in men and women (5). Oral administration is well tolerated, but long-term toxic effects have not been studied. • can potentially interact with numerous drugs causing severe adverse effects. • Although yohimbine has been shown to be an effective treatment for erectile dysfunction in some clinical trials, it can also cause side effects including nervous excitation, tremors, high blood pressure, nausea, and vomiting.

Since there is so much information on the Internet, it is easy to become overwhelmed with what information to trust. Here are some suggestions on how to critically evaluate the quality of information you receive

1. Is it actually 100% natural?

Although many sites claim that their products are 100% natural, one study suggests that they might not be. Some products advertised on websites have been found to contain PDE-5 inhibitors - active pharmaceutical compounds used to achieve erections. The presence of PDE-5 inhibitors can be extremely dangerous for some people as it may result in life-threatening hypotension if taken with nitrates. Vinarol and Hua Fo are just two products that have been recalled in the US and Canada for this reason.

Also, look at the ingredients. What are the ingredients and are the ingredients even listed?

2. Although a compound is natural, it does not mean it is safe.

Some herbs commonly used for erectile dysfunction are yohimbine, ginseng and Ginko biloba. Yohimbine, although it is an herb, can cause headaches, sweating, and hypertension. In addition, people who have cardiovascular and neurological diseases are advised against it. Similarly, ginseng can cause gastrointestinal disturbances and dermatitis, and is contraindicated in patients who have

acute inflammatory disease and bronchitis. Ginkgo biloba, another herb, can cause diarrhea, vomiting, headaches, allergic skin reactions, and can enhance the action of anticoagulants such as aspirin or warfarin, making it unsuitable for men who are using them for the treatment of cardiovascular or cerebrovascular disorders.

3. Disclaimers, warnings, contraindications?

It is a good idea to be cautious of the information provided on websites that advertise erectile enhancement drugs. According to a study done in 2005, they found that only 33% (of the 50 websites that were evaluated) provided disclaimers. Furthermore, only 36% of those sites provided contraindications and 21% indicated drug side effects. This is especially important for men who are taking medication for other conditions as the herbs may interact negatively with the medications.

4. Is there scientific data to support the claims?

Many companies advertise their products with catchy claims like the ones mentioned above. However, if only testimonials are listed, use caution as testimonials are considered the weakest source of scientific evidence.

Another thing to watch out for is the use of scientific language, as it may be used just to sound impressive. Here are some examples: “Increases nitric oxide release and inhibits PDE-5, allowing erections to be sustained for longer periods of time” and “Increases dopamine levels, igniting a euphoric feeling and increasing sensations during orgasm.”

5. Where is the product produced? (labeling restrictions, production restrictions, variations)

Where the product is produced can have an impact on your product. Different countries may have different regulations regarding production and labeling. For example, in Canada, Health Canada regulates product licensing, site licensing, good manufacturing practices, clinical trials, labeling, and health claims of many natural health products (NHP) to ensure that Canadians have “access to safe, effective and high quality natural health products”. However, other countries may not have to abide by such stringent laws with the production of their products.

6. Who provides the information on the website?

According to the same study mentioned above, of the 50 websites that were evaluated, only 21% of sites had information provided by medically trained personnel, 24% stated that their information was not to be replaced by a doctor’s advice, and only 18% had reference information.

Look for information that is developed by qualified health professionals (e.g RN = registered nurse, RD = registered dietitian, MD = medical doctor) or posted on a reputable website (e.g. Health Canada). Also, who provides the funding for the website? This may be a source of bias of the information provided. Another important feature to look at is how current the information was posted or updated. Information posted 5 or more years ago may be outdated.

7. How can you make sure you are getting reliable information?

Health on the Net (HON) Foundation. The HON is an accreditation body that reviews websites who provide medical and health information on the web. HON provides a search engine to help you find quality and reliable information on the web. More information can be found at <http://www.hon.ch/index.html>.

The Prostate Education & Research Centre



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