

The HIS Report

The Attitudes of Mid-Life Males to Health, Identity and Sex

While middle-aged men come in all shapes and sizes, they have much in common when it comes to their outlook on health, how they define their identity and their attitudes to sex.

The HIS Report examines the attitudes of Australian men aged 40-69 years in three interrelated areas: Health, Identity and Sex and is based on a survey of more than 1,500 men conducted in March 2012.

This research provides insights to help medical professionals and men deal with health issues which, due to their sensitive nature, are often misunderstood or simply ignored.

In my clinical experience, I have found that a strong connection exists between a man's sex life, the state of his physical and mental health and his overall sense of identity.

The HIS Report found that 47% of middle-aged men surveyed suffer some level of erectile dysfunction, with 67% considering their condition to be a problem. And yet, only half of these men had sought treatment.

To summarise the research:

HEALTH: Australian men aged 40-69 years regularly visit a doctor and are comfortable talking about a range of medical issues. Regrettably, comfort levels drop when it comes to issues of a personal or sensitive nature. However, the majority of men find it easier to talk about their libido or erection problems if their doctor indicates these issues may be related to or caused by another health condition. Among those men who have sought help for erection problems, the majority wish they had done so earlier.

IDENTITY: Self-esteem, looking and feeling younger and retaining sex appeal are important to middle-aged men and many men associate a healthy erection with a healthy body and state-of-mind. Erection problems impact significantly on a man's sense of identity, confidence and masculinity.

SEX: A healthy sex life is important to the vast majority of men, with many anticipating an increase in their level of sexual activity when they retire or their children leave home. Interestingly, many men in this age group take the ability to have sex for granted and believe there is little chance they will be affected by erection problems.

I hope this research provides useful insights to the state-of-mind of many patients and equips you to initiate conversations that address some of the sensitive medical issues that impact on the health, identity and sex life of men in their middle-age.



Foreword by
Dr Michael Gillman

Health Institute
for Men (HIM),
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Contrary to popular belief, most men do visit the doctor regularly

The majority of men (86 per cent) aged 40-69 years who were surveyed have consulted a doctor in the past 12 months, with an average of four visits each.

Older men are the most regular visitors to the doctor with virtually all of those aged 60-69 years having consulted a doctor in the past 12 months.

Blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and weight are the health issues most men aged 40-69 years would expect to discuss with their doctor when having a general health check.

The symptoms most likely to prompt middle-aged men to visit their doctor are those that:

- ▶ Might be an early sign of a more serious condition (73%)
- ▶ Are an everyday nuisance (54%)
- ▶ Cause stress or anxiety (48%)
- ▶ Necessitate time off work (47%)

Sensitive issues remain on the backburner

When it comes to health issues of a sensitive or personal nature, 56 per cent of those men surveyed would initially turn to their wife or partner to discuss the problem. This increases to 70 per cent among those men who are married.

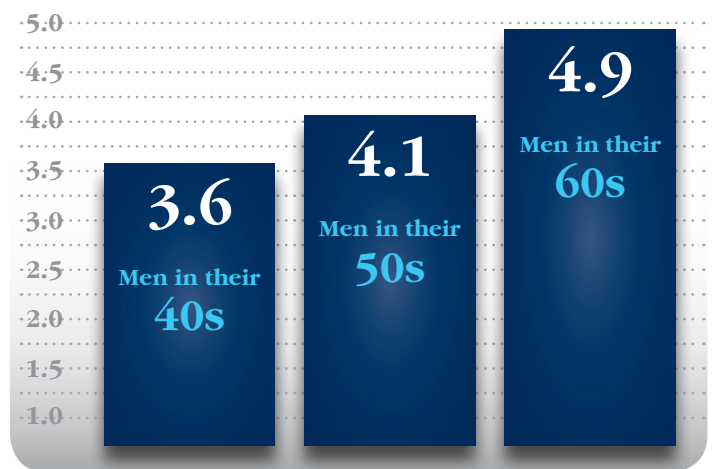
More than half of all men aged 40-69 years indicate they would not be comfortable seeking advice from a doctor about erection problems or their libido.

Even among men who consider their erection difficulties to be a major problem, around one-in-three do not feel comfortable discussing these topics with a doctor. Similarly, half of men who experience urinary problems have never consulted a doctor about their issues.

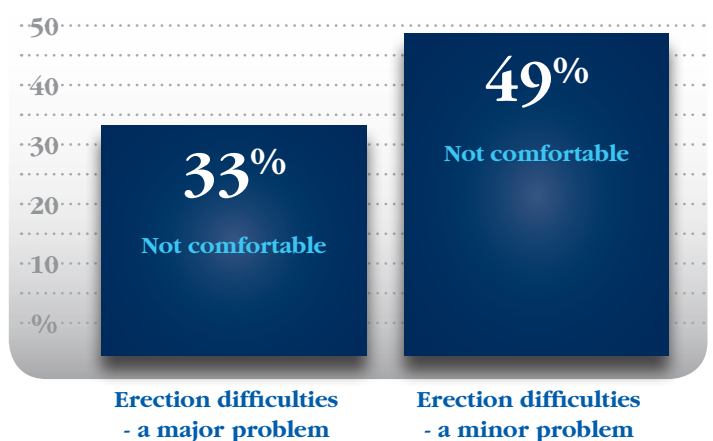
Men will open up if they understand cause and effect

Most mid-life males surveyed say they would find it easier to talk about issues to do with their sex life (such as libido or erection problems) if their doctor indicated they may be linked to or caused by another health condition.

Average number of visits to the doctor in past year



Seeking advice from a doctor – comfort levels among men who consider their erection difficulties a problem



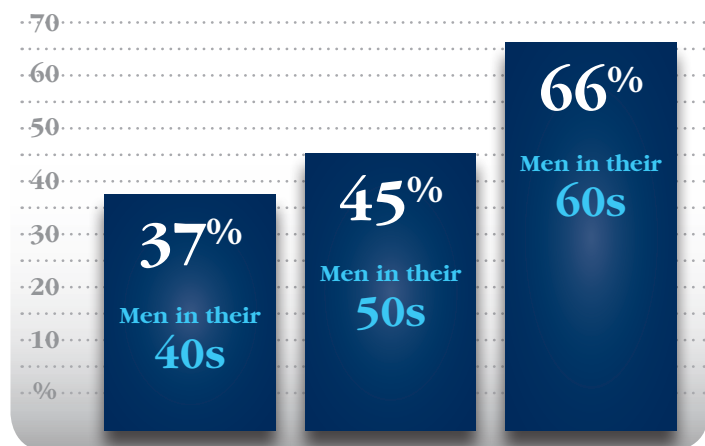
“ I am too embarrassed to go to the doctor so I suffer in silence and my sex life is zilch. ”

– survey respondent

Erection problems more common than many realise

Nearly half (47 per cent) of the men surveyed have some level of erection difficulty and this increases with age.

Prevalence of erection problems



"While men might be visiting their doctor more often than expected, they're still avoiding talking about sensitive and important issues like urinary symptoms or erection problems, which have a major impact on their health and sense of self. Knowing that men find it hard to bring up sensitive issues, as doctors we need to find ways to help men feel more comfortable doing so."

Dr Michael Gillman

The majority of men with any degree of erection difficulty consider their condition to be a problem (67 per cent), with 19 per cent seeing it as a major problem.

More than half of men who consider their erection difficulties to be a problem have not tried any form of treatment. Among those who have sought treatment, the most popular is prescription medication (34 per cent) which they considered the most effective option (50 per cent).

Many men wish they had sought help earlier

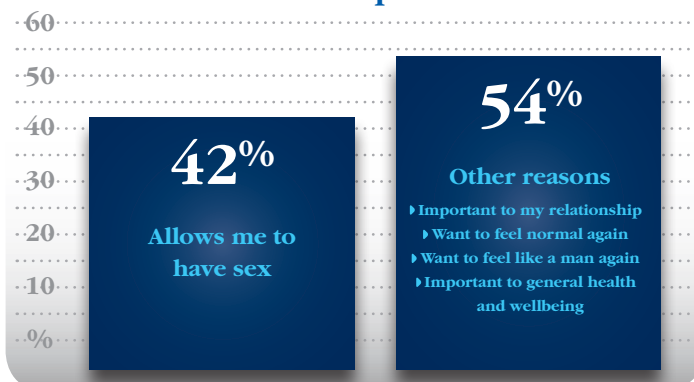
Among those with erection problems who have sought treatment:

- ▶ **44% wish they'd sought help earlier**
- ▶ **58% whose erection difficulties are considered a major problem wish they'd sought help earlier**

Motivations for seeking treatment for erection problems extend beyond the inability to have sex. Many men recognise that treatment is important for their relationship and their general health and wellbeing, while others have sought treatment because they want to feel 'normal again' or 'like a man again'.

For more than half (54 per cent) of men with erection problems the 'main reasons' for seeking treatment relate to issues other than the ability to have sex.

Main reasons for seeking treatment for erection problems



“... Maybe I’m like a lot of men and just push the thoughts of what could or may be wrong to the back of my mind.”

– survey respondent

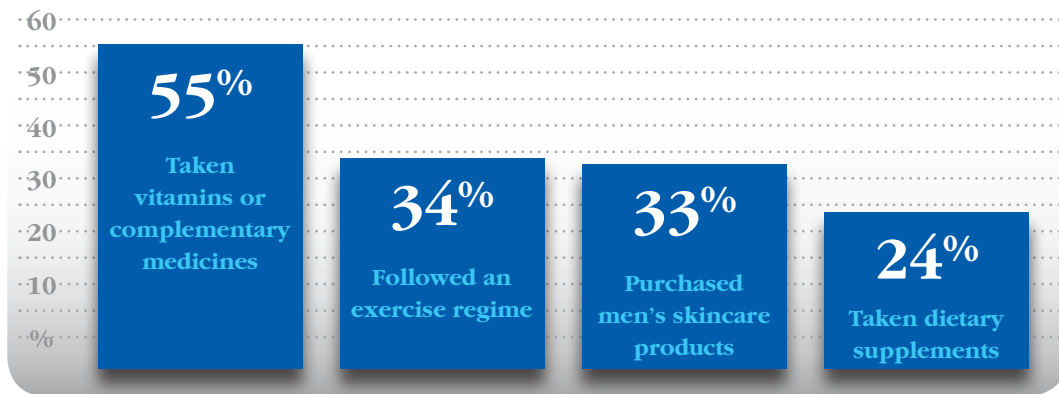
IDENTITY

Self-esteem, looks and sex appeal remain important

Australian men have embraced health and wellbeing regimes in their middle-age.

In the past 12 months, 76 per cent of men aged 40-69 years who were surveyed have undertaken some kind of health or wellbeing-related activity.

Health and wellbeing activity in past year



When asked why they undertook health and wellbeing regimes, the most common motivators were:

- ▶ Health reasons (87%)
- ▶ Self-esteem (29%)
- ▶ Looking and feeling younger (28%)
- ▶ Retaining their sex appeal (11%)

The desire to look and feel younger and retain sex appeal is more important to men aged in their forties than men aged 50-69 years.

Men associate a healthy erection with a healthy body and state-of-mind

Nearly two thirds of men aged 40-69 years surveyed associate a healthy erection with a healthy body and healthy state-of-mind.

The majority of middle-aged men (83 per cent) would be concerned at the possibility of being unable to achieve and maintain an erection, including 40 per cent who would be very concerned.

Their two greatest concerns would be:

- ▶ The inability to have sex (60%)
- ▶ The inability to satisfy their partner (56%)

“ It makes you depressed. You worry about it and it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy next time. ”

– survey respondent

Erection problems strike at a man's identity

Concerns around erection problems extend beyond the ability to have sex and include the impact it would have on:

- ▶ Their relationship with a partner (48%)
- ▶ Their self-assurance (40%)
- ▶ Their sense of manhood (35%)

While men accept that erection problems would impact on their life, 63 per cent believe there is little or no chance they will suffer from the condition during their lifetime.

Key reasons for complacency include that men claim to look after their health (23 per cent) and have no known family history of erection difficulties (21 per cent). Nearly one quarter of men surveyed dismiss the prospect of erection difficulties on the basis that if it happened to them they would probably be so old it wouldn't matter anyway.

"Erection problems are not limited to the impact they have on a man's sex life. He's living with this condition every day and it really takes its toll on his self-assurance and masculinity. Men need to open up about these issues to their doctor so that they can find a treatment and go back to feeling like the man they used to be."

Dr Michael Gillman

Men are more likely to consider erection problems a sign of ageing (46 per cent) rather than an indication of an underlying health issue (36 per cent).

Treatment needs to address the ongoing nature of erection problems

The impact on men surveyed who consider their erection difficulties to be a major problem extends beyond the immediate inability to have sex with many saying:

- ▶ They feel less self-assured (70%)
- ▶ They now feel less of a man than before (64%)

Most sufferers (67 per cent) who consider their condition to be a problem are concerned the condition is only going to get worse. Concerns are most acute among those already finding their erection difficulties to be a major problem.

More than half (60 per cent) of those surveyed agree that having a physical response when aroused is important to their masculinity, and only 18 per cent of men do not consider their penis to be an important part of their identity.

“ I feel that I'm only half the man I used to be. ”

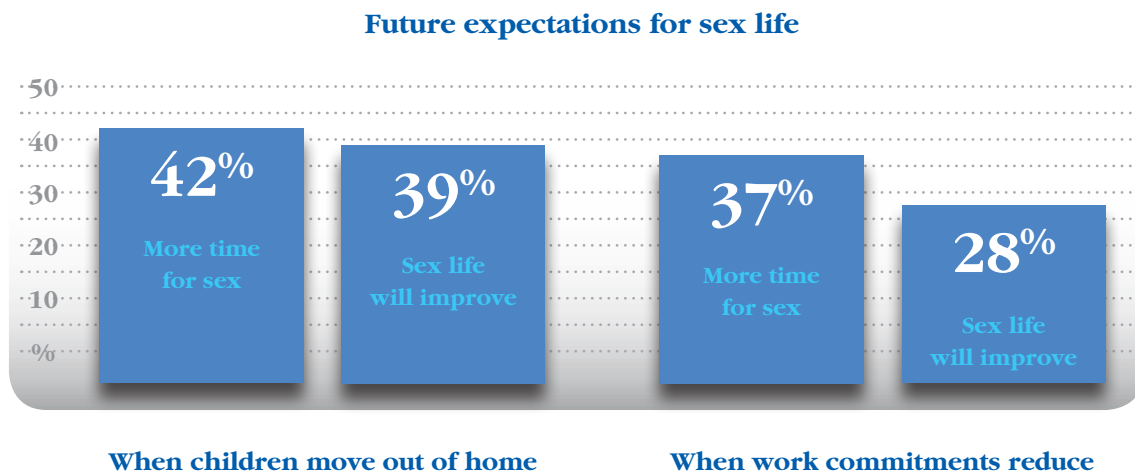
– survey respondent

A healthy sex life is important – today and in the future

Having a healthy sex life is considered important to 80 per cent of men aged 40-69 years who were surveyed. This includes more than a third who consider a healthy sex life to be very important.

However, most men aged 40-69 years believe they are having sex less often than other men their age. While mid-life males say they are having sex three times per month on average, they consider five times a month to be the norm for men their age.

There is an expectation among men with children that their sex life will improve when their children leave home and among working men that their sex life will improve once they retire.



The ability to have sex is often taken for granted

Many men appear complacent about the ability to have sex and take a healthy sex life for granted.

Among those surveyed who do not experience erection problems, 20 per cent consider a healthy sex life to be very important. However, this rises to 48 per cent among those for whom erection difficulties are a major problem.

The frequency of having, or attempting sex, declines markedly as the severity of erection problems increases.

Around half of men with moderate or severe erection problems have not had sexual intercourse or any other sexual activity in the past six months.

Among those who have had some sexual contact, half gained little or no enjoyment from the experience.

“As sex plays an integral role in marriage, erection problems affect every aspect. I sometimes feel I am rejected because of it ... It does affect the way I see myself and the way I relate to others.”

– survey respondent

Men know what they consider a normal response

Among men with erection problems, 80 per cent of those surveyed consider it normal for a man of their age to achieve an erection during physical contact with someone who is sexually attractive, 23 per cent think they would be unlikely to do so.

For those with severe erection problems, almost half think it is unlikely they would achieve an erection in such a situation.

Not achieving an erection during occasions when it is considered a normal response is a concern to three quarters of sufferers and nearly two thirds acknowledge this impacts on their daily life.

Among those for whom erection difficulties are a major problem, 86 per cent say not responding physically to sexual stimulus impacts on their daily life.

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"Sex is still as important for many men in middle-age as it was when they were younger. When erection problems start to hamper a man's sex life, it can really mess with their psyche and in many cases cause the breakdown of a relationship. Communicating with their partner or a family member and seeking advice from their doctor are vital to get back on the path to feeling normal again."

Dr Michael Gillman

Erection problems extend beyond the bedroom

More than a third of surveyed men with erection problems find it difficult interacting with people they find attractive because it reminds them of their erection difficulties.

Around half of all sufferers report a loss of intimacy with their partner as a result of their condition, including:

- ▶ **Fewer intimate conversations (19%)**
- ▶ **Less kissing (17%)**
- ▶ **Less cuddling and hugging (16%)**

This loss of intimacy relates to the severity of their symptoms. While only 33 per cent of those with mild erection problems report less intimacy, this increases to 77 per cent among those with severe erection problems.

The majority of men that consider their erection difficulties to be a major problem say:

- ▶ **They had a more intimate and fulfilling relationship before suffering from erection problems**
- ▶ **Their erection problems have changed the dynamic they have with their partner**
- ▶ **The impact of their erection problems extends beyond the ability to have sex**

**“ I constantly think about it and regret
(the) inability to have a sex life ... ”**

– survey respondent

The HIS Report was developed from research undertaken by Galaxy Research on behalf of Lilly Australia. The research was conducted among a representative sample of 1,512 men aged 40-69 years distributed throughout Australia, including capital cities and regional areas. Fieldwork was undertaken in March 2012.

To download a copy of The HIS Report please visit www.HISreport.com.au.

