



Sexual and reproductive health contribute to an overall sense of well-being among men and women alike.

Empowering men

By THERESA BELLE

HUMAN civilisation started out in hunter-gatherer tribes, where differences in physical ability led to the creation of gender-specific roles: men typically did the hunting while women gathered resources from the wild.

The physical size and strength of men have placed them in positions of power throughout history, all of which laid the foundations of what we now consider masculinity.

Masculinity is known by a variety of terms, including manliness and machismo.

Aggression and sexual arousal became traits that are commonly associated with men and have become used as identifiers to distinguish men from women.

Therefore, being masculine became about fitting into a certain box, the building blocks of which were strength and sexual prowess.

As a result, boys grow up with a certain pressure to live up to age-old expectations or risk becoming "less of a man".

Timely shift of attitudes

The role of sexual ability in determining masculinity has perhaps led to the belief that failure to perform sexually calls a man's very identity into question.

Even with the advanced state of healthcare today, some men suffer from all kinds of health issues, including sexual disorders, in silence because seeking medical assistance is considered a sign of inadequacy or weakness.

It comes as no surprise then that men have shorter life expectancies and a well-documented history of poor health compared to women.

The situation is not all doom and gloom though – andrologist Dr Mohd Ismail Mohd Tambi says that awareness of sexual and reproductive issues among men has been on the rise, although the hesitance to visiting a doctor



Embarrassment should not deter you from bringing your health issues to a doctor.

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regularly is still visible.

"Most men wait too long then come to see me expecting an overnight cure, which is just not how it works," he says.

For example, Dr Mohd Ismail explains that the treatment of erectile difficulties often involves investigating and curing the root cause, which may take some time.

"Sexual dysfunction can be caused by health conditions or medication used to treat those conditions. It is usually an indicator of an underlying issue, which must be addressed primarily," he explains.

Consultant urologist and transplant surgeon at Columbia Asia Hospital Puchong Dr Arumuga Kumar observes that partners play an increasingly important role in

men bringing their sexual issues to light.

"We see a trend of spouses pushing men to seek treatment, and some patients even come with their partners now instead of suffering alone without being able to express it," he says.

This highlights the importance of support and understanding within relationships, which go a long way in dismissing thoughts of inadequacy or shame among men with sexual issues.

Stress and anxiety are known contributors of sexual dysfunction but can also be the product of it, thus trapping men in an unfortunate cycle that they find tough to break out of on their own.

More than meets the eye

According to Dr Arumuga, a common condition faced by Malaysian men is erectile dysfunction, both psychogenic (caused by psychological or emotional stressors) and vasculogenic (caused by blood vessel dysfunction).

The former is commonly associated with premature ejaculation, occurring more often among younger men.

Lifestyle plays essential role

THE 2011 study *Male sexual dysfunction in Asia*, published in the *Asian Journal of Andrology*, noted that many men viewed their body as machines that can be fixed with a simple solution if something goes awry.

Applying the same logic to the opposite effect, men should maintain their "machines" for better long-term performance instead of sending it to the workshop for a quick fix when it breaks down.

Keeping yourself healthy and fit is important in ensuring a well-functioning sexual and reproductive system.

Besides psychological and emotional stressors, practising unhealthy habits can eventually take a toll on your sexual performance and desire.

Here are some factors that could contribute to sexual dysfunction among men:

- **Stress and anxiety** – Male sexual performance relies heavily on excitement and pleasure, which can be compromised if you are not in a healthy, happy mental state.

Men who are unable to achieve sexual excitement could be stressed or depressed, or experiencing performance anxiety.

- **Obesity** – Obese men tend to have lower levels of testosterone, which is the hormone responsible for sperm production and libido.

They are therefore more susceptible to erectile dysfunction and fertility issues. On top of that, men who are obese may experience diminished sexual desire.

- **Smoking and substance abuse** – Smoking can damage the circulatory system and affect blood flow, which makes it hard to maintain or even achieve an erection.

Fertility issues are also common among smokers because smoking can lower the sperm count.

Drugs damage the systems similarly, and while alcohol is commonly mistaken as an aphrodisiac, too much of it can actually inhibit testosterone production and affect your sex drive.

- **Lack of exercise and sedentary lifestyle** – Physical inactivity can be damaging to health and lead to obesity. To take back control of your well-being, start eating healthier and incorporate some form of exercise in your busy schedule.



Smoking can cause erectile dysfunction and lower sperm count.

Psychological stressors are not the only contributor. A 2011 profile on Malaysian men's health challenges published in the *Asian Journal of Andrology* emphasised the holistic approach adapted in modern healthcare, which includes male psychological, social and physical health.

"We have to take overall health into account when discussing sexual health. More often than not, these sexual conditions are the result of other diseases," says Dr Mohd Ismail.

These include major non-communicable diseases such as diabetes or blood pressure and cardiovascular complications.

Diabetics, for example, may experience nerve control issues that can cause ejaculatory disturbances.

"Diabetes also affects microcirculation, which can then affect bodily functions, including those of sexual organs," says Dr Sendhil Kumar, consultant ophthalmologist at Mahkota Medical Centre.

The eyes can be an indicator of a person's general health condition because of the micro blood vessels they contain, which make them the "window to a body's microcirculatory network".

Taking a proactive stance

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It is common for ageing men to experience sexual difficulties as a result of waning health, but doctors are reporting that this is not just an issue of age anymore.

Sedentary lifestyles and unhealthy habits are making modern Malaysian men a lot more susceptible to diseases than their predecessors, and unless active measures are taken to turn this trend around, it can cause an inevitable decline into more widespread sexual dysfunction.

Overcoming as one

Dr Mohd Ismail remembers a time when the extent of male involvement in sexual health was providing semen samples for fertility tests.

"It is great that more men know about the variety of issues they could face today and strive to take their sexual health seriously," he says.

It would therefore be more beneficial to educate men on how to safely and thoroughly manage their sexual health instead of enforcing ideologies of sexuality.

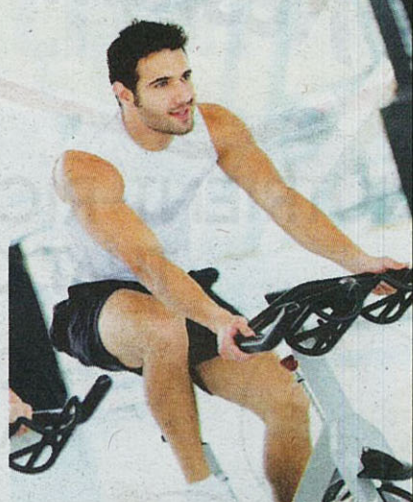
Organisations such as the PT Foundation, for example, provide HIV/AIDS support and counselling to men who have sex with men and other vulnerable groups, while The Befrienders provides mental

and emotional support.

In today's society, improved attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health mean that men are more concerned and their partners more considerate.

Although the existence of these organisations and changing norms signify growing attention and effort towards bettering the social climate, perceptions of masculinity continue to dictate male attitudes towards sexual health.

The best way to move forward is with an open mind and a primary concern for well-being, which can foster educational discourse in empowering men to love and care for their bodies the same way women are encouraged to.



Exercise keeps the body fit, which facilitates functions of all systems.

Truth or myth?

Andrologist Dr Mohd Ismail Mohd Tambi says that many of the common misconceptions his patients have about their sexual health are about masturbation, including:

- ✘ Excessive masturbation can cause fertility issues as constant ejaculation exhausts semen.
- ✘ It can cause rapid ejaculation or erectile dysfunction.

However, it is important to remember that:

- ✔ Excessive masturbation can

be detrimental to health as it exhausts the mind and body. Chronic masturbators can make up excuses to keep their habit going.

- ✔ It can become addictive because of the pleasure and feelings of relief it provides.
- ✔ It can contribute to overall dissatisfaction with your sex life, as some men become too accustomed to their own methods that they are unable to climax through intercourse with a partner.

Common male sexual issues

EVALUATION of sexual dysfunction involves a detailed review of medical, sexual and psychological history and a physical examination.

Doctors may ask many personal questions about your sex life, but rest assured that it is part of the diagnostic process and will not disclose your information without your consent.

Here are the main types of sexual dysfunction faced by men:

● **Ejaculation disorders** – These occur when a man is able to perform sexually but experiences anomalies during ejaculation. They consist of:

– Premature ejaculation, which refers to ejaculation that occurs before or too soon after physical stimulation (including penetration). This is often caused by performance anxiety, antidepressant medication or nerve damage to the back and spinal cord.

– Inhibited or retarded ejaculation, which is when ejaculation takes too long or occurs after a long delay of stimulation.

– Retrograde ejaculation, also referred to as "dry ejaculation", which is when the ejaculate is

forced back into the bladder rather than go through the urethra and out the end of the penis. Men who suffer from diabetic neuropathy (nerve damage), who have recently undergone surgery on or near the pelvic area and who are on certain medication may face this rare condition.

● **Erectile dysfunction** – Also known as impotence, this refers to the inability to attain or maintain an erection suitable for intercourse. This condition often indicates nerve damage or affected blood flow but may also be caused by psychological factors or existing diseases.

Peyronie's disease, a condition in which scar tissue develops inside the penis and causes curvature and painful erections, is another rare cause of erectile dysfunction.

● **Inhibited sexual desire** – Also known as loss of libido or diminished sexual desire, this is commonly experienced by men as they enter their golden years. This condition may also indicate testosterone deficiency or poor mental and physical health.

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Restore your ideal well-being

IF you are in your 40s, often feel tired or depressed, lack energy and are not enjoying your relationship with your partner as you used to, you might be dealing with low testosterone levels.

Testosterone is a hormone responsible for male physical characteristics such as facial, pubic and body hair, muscle development and sperm production.

Low testosterone levels do not only affect older men. Testosterone levels can begin to decline by about 1% to 3% as early as at the age of 30.

As the decrease in testosterone levels is gradual and at a rate of about 1% per year, most men will only realise its impact when they have experienced a drastic drop in testosterone levels in their mid-40s to 50s.

This testosterone deficiency is sometimes referred to as andropause (the male equivalent of menopause) or late-onset hypogonadism.

Just like with oestrogen in women, the decline in testosterone levels in men is part of the ageing process. As a result of this decline, sex drive, muscle mass development and various other physiological issues will slowly be affected.

In some cases, low testosterone



Diminished testosterone levels can effect familial relationships.

levels can lead to more serious problems, including premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction, which can affect relationships.

Symptoms of andropause:

- Low libido (sex drive)
- Decreased erectile quality
- Decreased lean body mass
- Lack of muscle bulk and strength
- Increased abdominal fat

- Diminished physical or work performance
- Bone loss and osteoporosis
- Hair loss or decreased body hair
- Changes in mood (irritability, depression, anger, mood swings)
- Enlarged breasts
- Low or zero sperm count

Low testosterone has also been

known to aggravate risk factors of diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and hypertension.

Natural remedy

Testofen is a unique fenugreek seed (*Trigonella foenum-graecum*) extract, standardised to 50% Fenuside and patented and owned by Gencor Pacific Group Inc, United States.

The company's research on Testofen indicated that Testofen displays testosterone-like activities such as improving androgenic and anabolic functions.

A double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled clinical study published in *Phytotherapy* in 2001 was conducted on 60 healthy men aged 25 to 52.

The Testofen group was assigned to receive 600mg of Testofen daily for six weeks and results showed that 85.2% of them experienced an overall positive effect on the physiological aspects of libido as early as three weeks after consumption.

The active group also experienced a statistically significant increase in sexual function and performance as well as an increase in muscle strength, energy levels and well-being.

Testofen was proven to be well tolerated by all subjects of the study. It is safe and has shown no adverse effects on kidney function, liver enzymes and blood biochemistry.

Therefore, it is suitable for long-term use to help increase testosterone levels in men.

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The advancement of a distinct multi-disciplinary specialty private hospital group whose presence today spans across South Asia and Southeast Asia with 2 decades of quality patient care.

Columbia Asia Group of Hospitals' presence in Malaysia spans almost two decades. From their humble beginnings, today Columbia Asia has 28 hospitals in operation, which cover four major countries in South Asia. This modern private healthcare group has plans to further expand their presence across the rest of Asia with six more facilities currently at different stages of development. Columbia Asia now owns and manages 11 private hospitals throughout Malaysia, three in Indonesia, three in Vietnam and 11 in India.

Columbia Asia's latest addition is Columbia Asia Hospital - Petaling Jaya (CAH-PJ), a fully equipped private multi-disciplinary specialty hospital located right in the heart of Petaling Jaya along the busy Jalan Universiti. This new Columbia Asia Hospital offers many specialised medical and surgical services that effectively manage the majority of medical conditions confronting and impacting the lives of the community today.

Among the many attributes, one of the primary success factors of the Columbia Asia Hospital model is the comprehensiveness of their medical programme and their strong sense of commitment towards clinical governance and patient care.

The hospital's medical programme comprises Internal Medicine; Paediatrics; Obstetrics and Gynaecology; General Surgery; Orthopaedics; Paediatric Orthopaedic/Spine; Ear,

Nose & Throat Surgery; Ophthalmology; Urology; Anaesthesiology and Radiology.

Among the highlights of CAH-PJ is spine surgery. The hospital is capable of handling the majority of spinal problems both in children and adults and from trauma to corrective surgeries. Among the most difficult surgery in orthopaedics is the correction of scoliosis. CAH-PJ has a team of orthopaedic surgeons specialising in this procedure.

Heart disease is the most common non-communicable disease in these modern times. CAH-PJ is in the process of installing a cardiac catheterisation lab to allow procedures like angiography, stenting or balloon angioplasty to be performed. A team of experienced cardiologists are ready to handle various types of cardiac diseases.

CAH-PJ also has many other specialised services available. Gastroenterology services include gastroscopy and colonoscopy. Hepatobiliary services include laparoscopic cholecystectomy and many other liver and gallbladder surgeries.

Across the group, Columbia Asia provides many similar specialised services. Among the services available are respiratory medicine, rheumatology, colorectal surgery, breast and endocrine surgery, sport medicine, hand and micro surgery and many more.

Medical governance remains an important pillar in ensuring a healthcare facility remains focused on providing the best patient care possible. Every Columbia Asia Hospital has a Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) which consists of the heads of department of each medical and surgical discipline and is chaired by the Chief of Medical Services based in each Columbia Asia Hospital.

Above this medical governing structure at the facility, Columbia Asia prides itself in having established a Medical Advisory Board (MAB) which is made up of all the Chiefs of Medical Services from all Columbia Asia Group of Hospitals. The Medical Advisory Board is chaired by the company's Group Medical Director.

The three primary roles and focus of the MAB is to continually raise the standard and quality of patient care; conduct stringent credentialing and clinical privileging of consultants; and uphold uncompromising commitment towards the ethics and conduct of practitioners of patient care.

Over the years, these values have remained the pillars of Columbia Asia's medical programme. The success of this private healthcare model is being replicated across the region to help meet the ever-growing demand for effective and efficient healthcare. Columbia Asia is today at the forefront of being one of the preferred healthcare providers for families, corporates, third party administrators and insurance.

