

What to Do if Your Penis Goes Numb

Freaking out isn't the answer. Here's why it happens and how to get sensation back.

BY DAVID MCGLYNN

FEB 22, 2021



As anyone who's taken a hit there is well aware, your penis is one of the most sensitive areas of your body. The groin contains a ridiculously high number of nerve endings, necessary for stimulating arousal and achieving an erection. So it's alarming when your lieutenant goes numb or loses some of its sensitivity.

There are numerous reasons your penis can feel numb, including medication, bad habits, hormones, and even some medical conditions. And in some cases, lost sensitivity is caused by injury. One common one is too much time on the bike. Believe it or not, excessive masturbation and sex can also lead to a drop in sensitivity, too. Here's why that sensitivity drop happens: "The pudendal nerve runs through the perineum, the area between the rectum and the scrotum," says Larry Lipshultz, MD, MH advisor and a professor of urology at Baylor College of Medicine. "Prolonged pressure in this area can cause neuropraxia [a compression injury of the penile nerve] and blood vessel irritation." Take a break from

the activity and the feeling should return. A pair of padded bike shorts can't hurt, either (see more, below).

A certain degree of penile numbness and decreased sensitivity is normal, especially as men age. But a sudden loss of sensation is sure a sign of a problem. Here's how to know whether to wait it out or call the doc.

Numbness reason: Sore in the saddle

A long ride, whether on a bike or a horse, can result in a condition known as saddle anesthesia, a numbing of the butt, inner thighs, and groin. But the desensitivity shouldn't last for more than a few hours. "If your hips and butt start to feel better by the next morning, but your penis is still numb, that's a sign of trauma," says New York City-based urologist Elizabeth Kavalier, MD, a *Men's Health* advisor. "It's important to pay attention to disparities."

Trauma to the penis can result from sex, too. Overzealous intercourse or unconventional sexual positions can cause the tunica albuginea, the fibrous casing sheathing the corpora cavernosa, to tear. The injury is dramatic and painful and requires surgery to repair. If a wild and crazy roll in the hay leaves you feeling numb, Dr. Kavalier says not to wait to get it checked out.

Numbness reason: High blood pressure, diabetes, or other conditions

Even though it's rare for the penis to go completely numb, a noticeable decrease in groin sensation could be a sign of an undiagnosed medical issue, such as hypertension, diabetes, or multiple sclerosis. "A problem with your penis is often a harbinger of cardiovascular or neurological disease," says Adam Murphy, M.D., a professor of urology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. Murphy says it's common for men not to recognize the symptoms of conditions like diabetes, which include intense thirst, hunger, or sugar cravings. And your blood pressure can climb dangerously high earlier in your life than you think (see [what's happening with millennials](#)). If left unmanaged, diabetes or MS can cause permanent nerve and blood vessel damage. The good news is that treating the underlying disease early enough can help sensation

Other conditions causing a dip in sensitivity include prostatitis, a swelling the prostate gland often caused by a bacterial infection. More common in men younger than 50, as well as men who are HIV+, the condition can also result from a pelvic injury. It's typically treated with antibiotics and anti-inflammatories.

Numbness reason: Meds you're taking

Certain mental wellness medications—including antidepressants—can cause groin numbing as a side effect. A study published in *The International Journal of Risk & Safety in Medicine*, involving more than 300 men from 37 countries, found that taking SSRI antidepressants such as Prozac overlapped with decreased genital sensitivity. In this case, an added wrinkle is that depression and anxiety—the very conditions SSRIs treat—can also lead to a reduced libido. Murphy says that meds, whether for ED or mood disorders, are never one-size fits all. “People respond differently to different pills,” he says. Before you flush your meds, talk to your doctor about adjusting your dosage or trying a different drug. (Definitely don't just stop them cold.)

Numbness reason: Not-great habits

You've been saying for years that you're going to quit smoking and cut back on drinking. If you haven't gotten around to it yet, and you've noticed some decreased responsiveness in your nether region, there's a good chance your penis is sending you a message. “Tobacco and alcohol aren't good for the testicles,” says Dr. Kavalier. In medical studies, tobacco has been shown to decrease the amount of nitric oxide in your body, the neurotransmitter that causes arousal and erection, and long-term alcohol abuse can lead to blunted libido, erectile dysfunction, and permanent nerve damage. Sensation should return to normal within about three months of quitting, Dr. Kavalier says.

Need help? The CDC offers a free smoking cessation app, quitSTART, that provides tips, inspiration, and even games to keep you from lighting up. For a boost curbing your booze intake, check out why so many people are drinking more now and expert strategies on how to cut back.

Numbness reason: Low-T

Low testosterone affects almost 40 percent of men aged 45 and older, though Dr. Lipshultz says it's rare for low-T to cause genital numbness or lessened sensitivity. Testosterone levels vary throughout the day and are affected by factors such as body mass index, nutrition, alcohol consumption, meds, and illness. Dr. Kavalier says neurological sensitivity changes as the body ages, and you can't expect to feel as tingly as a 15-year-old when you're pushing 50.

Men concerned about low testosterone should talk to their doctor. A variety of prescription treatments are available, ranging from skin patches to pills to injections. However, because moderate numbness is usually temporary, you might want to hold off on starting another medication. Dr. Lipshultz recommends pelvic floor physical therapy (PFPT), which works to relax the muscles surrounding the perineum. "If I were to have a patient with penile numbness or decreased sensitivity, I'd likely send them to a physical therapist," he says.