



Lower Rates of Erectile Dysfunction Linked to Plant-Based Diets

By Megan Edwards
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Whole-food, plant-based diets have been linked to decreased rates of [heart disease](#), [diabetes](#), [cancer](#), and other life-threatening ailments. Now, researchers are taking a closer look at the diet's potential benefits for sexual health. [A new study](#), presented at The American Association of Urology 2021 Conference, found that the closer a man sticks to a healthy plant-based diet, the less likely he is to suffer from erectile dysfunction.

Researchers looked at data collected from 2,549 men between the ages of 41 and 64 who participated in the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) from 1988 to 1994. They began by developing a healthful plant-based diet index (hPDI) based on the food frequency questionnaire the men filled out as part of the survey. From there, researchers examined the association between a high hPDI score and the frequency of reported erectile dysfunction.

Of the total participants, 57.4 percent reported "some degree" of ED. After multiple variables were accounted for, the researchers discovered that with every unit increase in a man's hPDI score, his risk of ED decreased.

"Sexual health is closely linked to [cardiovascular health](#). Erections require healthy blood vessels and good blood flow to the penis," explains Stacy Loeb, MD, professor of urology at NYU Grossman School of Medicine. "Erectile dysfunction has been called 'the canary in the coal mine' as it may precede cardiovascular events by several years. Consuming more healthful plant-based foods has been linked with a lower risk of cardiovascular disease, so it is not surprising that they are also associated with a lower risk of erectile dysfunction."

The Myth of Masculinity and Meat

A diet full of [red meat](#) has long been [considered a marker of "true" masculinity](#) and virility in Western cultures, but Loeb points out that the scientific literature refutes that assumption.

"Numerous studies have shown that men who consume more meat are more likely to develop erectile dysfunction. It is also important to note that the World Health Organization classifies [processed meats](#) like hot dogs and bacon as Group 1 carcinogens (i.e., causes cancer), the same category as smoking and asbestos. The World Health Organization classifies other meats like beef, pork and lamb as Group 2a carcinogens, which means they probably cause cancer. "

Plant-Based Diets Support Prostate Health Too

At the same time this study was released, two other studies were presented at the conference that linked a healthy vegan diet to lower PSA levels and decreased risk of [prostate cancer](#) in men.

In both studies, researchers tracked data from thousands of men across the United States and looked at whether diet choices impacted prostate health. The study that examined [PSA levels](#) concluded there is a significant association between a plant-based diet and lower PSA levels. The authors are now urging all medical professionals to incorporate diet as part of their treatment plans for men who are at an elevated risk of developing cancer.

In the study that explored the relationship between plant-based diets and rates of [prostate cancer diagnosis](#), researchers found that men under 65 at the time of diagnosis were less likely to develop advanced stages of cancer if they adhered to a healthful diet. Additionally, the data indicated that younger men who eat a plant-based diet have a significantly reduced risk of ever being diagnosed or dying from prostate cancer.

"Increased consumption of a healthy plant-based diet has significant benefits for urologic and sexual health," says Loeb. "These studies show that dietary interventions can make positive impacts for overall health, as well as specific urologic conditions faced

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by millions of men."