Priapism

Priapism is a persistent, often painful erection. It is the hardening of the penis in males and of the clitoris in females, even without sexual stimulation. Priapism may come on suddenly. Priapism may last a short while, or may last a long time. Priapism occurs in all ages. The medical terms for these problems include:

- Acute prolonged priapism- this means the attack comes on suddenly and lasts.
- Recurrent acute priapism- this means the attack comes on suddenly and tends to happen again.
- Chronic priapism- this is a persistent condition but with less of an erection.

CAUSES

There are many causes. Causes include:

- Blood problems common in these diseases:
  - Sickle cell disease.
  - Leukemia.
- The most common cause of priapism is the side effects of erectile dysfunction medicine (Viagra, Levitra, and Cialis).
- Side effects of prescription medicine used in the treatment of depression and anxiety.
- Illegal use of street drugs such as cocaine and marijuana.
- The excessive use of alcohol.
- Neurological problems such as multiple sclerosis.
- Diabetes mellitus.
- The cause may be unknown.

TREATMENT

Treatments depend on the cause. Some specific treatments include:

- Oxygen and red blood cell transfusions in the patients with sickle cell disease.
- A special treatment for plasma in those with leukemia.
- Removing blood that is trapped.
- Treatment with medicine.
- Surgical shunting (a passage that is made to allow blood to flow from one part of the body to another).

The above are specific treatments, there are general treatments that your physician may follow or recommend which can be done at home:

- Taking over-the-counter or prescription medicines for pain, discomfort, or fever as directed by your caregiver.
- Empty the bladder often once an attack has started and try to keep the bladder empty.
- Take warm baths.
- Exercise may help.
- Increase your fluid intake.

Complications of priapism:

- Impotence.
- Scarring know as Peyronie's Disease.

SEEK IMMEDIATE MEDICAL CARE IF:

- Your attack lasts longer than usual, especially if it approaches 3-4 hours.
- You develop an unexplained temperature of greater than 102°F (38.8°C).
- You develop pain which is not relieved with medications.
- You develop any new problems which were not present prior to the attack.
- You develop nausea or vomiting which prevents you from keeping fluids or medications down.

While the causes are many and the situation can be frightening and confusing, awareness and prompt medical intervention when needed can result in excellent relief and prevent potentially serious and long lasting complications.

Document Released: 11/09/2005 Document Re-Released: 10/15/2010
ExitCare® Patient Information ©2011 ExitCare, LLC.