

Viagra : gay men, sex and drugs / Terrence Higgins Trust.

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Gay men, sex and drugs

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What's the score?

Viagra is also known as: sildenafil or sildenafil citrate.

There are other erection drugs a lot like Viagra, such as Cialis (aka tadalafil) and Levitra (aka vardenafil). 'Generic Viagra' is an almost identical version of the drug but it's not sold under these well known brand names. One well known generic version is Kamagra. The information here is true for both Viagra and the other types of erection drugs.

The pills work by increasing the flow of blood to the dick, giving harder, longer lasting hard-ons. Effects last around four hours. Cialis tends to last longer (up to one or two days for some men).

Taking Viagra

A pill (or half of one) is swallowed about half an hour before sex. Viagra, etc. doesn't work as well if you've had a fatty meal or alcohol. A higher dose often doesn't mean better hard-ons, just more side effects. More than one dose shouldn't be taken over 24 hours.

Highs and lows

Viagra offers a quick fix for many men with erection problems, whether the cause is physical or more in the mind. Men with no real problems getting hard use these drugs too, to boost their sexual performance, especially if on chems that make getting hard-ons difficult.

Side effects can be a blocked nose, headache, a red face and chest, upset stomach or short-lived slight changes in vision.

They're less likely to work if you're anxious or your hard-on difficulties have a physical cause (diabetes, circulation or prostate problems).

Rare side effects include blindness, stroke, heart attack or death. But this is usually in men who are older and/or have existing health problems, especially if they're already on nitrate-based drugs for a heart condition.

Viagra with other drugs

HIV drugs – protease inhibitors push up levels of the erection drug in the body, so a lower dose of Viagra, etc is often needed. Check with your doctor.

Poppers – some makers of erection drugs warn against using them with poppers, as both lower blood pressure. Poppers are nitrites. A similar drug (nitrates) is taken by people with heart conditions. Taking Viagra, etc while on nitrates has killed men by causing a fatal drop in blood pressure. So to be on the safe side, caution is advised with poppers (nitrites) too.

Ecstasy – Viagra and E together (called 'sextasy') could strain the heart and has been known to cause a hard-on that won't go down. An erection lasting over four hours can damage a dick. Get medical help straight away.

Cocaine, crystal meth and speed (or chems that might have speed in them like ecstasy tablets) – taken together with Viagra these put extra pressure on the heart.



Useful to know

Pills sold over the internet may be fake.

Check with a doctor before taking erection drugs, especially if you're in one of these groups of men more likely to have a dangerous reaction. These are men who are:

- older
- overweight
- being treated for heart problems (especially with nitrate-based drugs)
- have abnormal blood pressure (and/or are taking alpha blockers for this)
- are on HIV drugs (protease inhibitors)
- have had a stroke/heart attack
- have glaucoma (high blood pressure in the eye) or diabetes.

The law

Generally you can only get Viagra-type drugs with a doctor's prescription, but they can be bought without one on the internet or from drug dealers.

Possession of the drug without a prescription isn't illegal but people have been prosecuted for selling the pills.

In 2007 a pilot scheme started allowing men to buy Viagra at some chemists without a prescription (but only after a health check).

Sex on Viagra

Erection drugs don't make you horny or cause instant hard-ons. They only start working after you get turned on. Some men say their hard-ons have less feeling and that coming's more difficult. But with drugs like Viagra, after they've come they can get hard again quicker.



More info

Problems with hard-ons can have physical causes, but can be down to anxiety, lack of testosterone (a problem for some men with HIV), tiredness, sexual boredom, alcohol, drugs and some medicines, including drugs for HIV or depression.

For more information check out:

Sexual Dysfunction Association www.sda.uk.net

If you'd like to talk to someone with lots of experience of alcohol and drug-related issues, there's:

One-2-One counselling with a drugs counsellor at **Terrence Higgins Trust's** London offices. It's free of charge and to see if this would be useful for you, call our **Wellbeing Service** on **0207 812 1777**.

Or you can ask one of the **LADS** outreach team (identifiable in venues and cruising areas by their LADS stand, t-shirts and ID badges) about speaking to our drugs worker.

Also, check out www.tht.org.uk / **DRUGFUCKED**

Antidote

A London service gay and bisexual men concerned about their alcohol or drug use can make use of, with weekly drop-in, one-to-one counselling, support groups and more. Call **020 7287 8743** or go to www.thehungerford.org/antidote.asp

Talk To Frank

Information and support around alcohol and drug use. Call the 24 hour helpline on **0800 77 66 00** or contact by email, details from their website. Also, check out the 'need help' section of the site, www.talktofrank.com