

PDE5 Inhibitors (ED & Prostate Pills)

WARWIKI

Patient Information · Pills for erectile dysfunction — and prostate urinary symptoms

PDE5 inhibitors are pills used to treat **erectile dysfunction (ED)**, and one of them (tadalafil) also eases the urinary symptoms of an **enlarged prostate**. Common ones are **sildenafil (Viagra)**, **tadalafil (Cialis)**, **vardenafile**, and **avanafil**. They help the body produce an erection in response to arousal — they do not create one on their own.

How It Works

These medicines **relax the blood vessels** in the penis so blood can flow in. Crucially, they work **only with sexual stimulation** — you still need to feel aroused; the pill does not cause an automatic erection. Tadalafil also relaxes muscle in the prostate and bladder, which is why a daily low dose can improve urine flow.

What to Expect

- **Sildenafil / vardenafil / avanafil** work in about **30–60 minutes** and last a few hours.
- **Tadalafil** is longer-acting (up to ~36 hours — the “weekend” option) or can be taken as a **low daily dose**.
- A heavy, fatty meal can **delay** sildenafil; tadalafil is unaffected by food.
- It may take a few tries to find the right dose and timing.

LEARN THE TERMS

PDE5 inhibitor

The class of pills (sildenafil, tadalafil, etc.) used for ED.

Erectile dysfunction (ED)

Trouble getting or keeping an erection firm enough for sex.

Nitrates

Heart/chest-pain medicines that must NEVER be combined with these pills.

As-needed vs. daily

Taken before sex, or a low dose every day.

BPH

Enlarged prostate; tadalafil also treats its urinary symptoms.

Priapism

An erection lasting over 4 hours — a medical emergency.

THE ONE RULE THAT MATTERS MOST Never take these pills with **nitrates** (such as nitroglycerin or isosorbide for chest pain) or with “poppers” (amyl nitrite). The combination can cause a **dangerous, even life-threatening drop in blood pressure**. Tell every clinician you take a PDE5 inhibitor.

How to Take It

- Take **as directed** — before sex (as-needed) or daily, depending on your prescription.
- For as-needed sildenafil, take on a **relatively empty stomach** for fastest effect.
- Don't take more than one dose in 24 hours unless told.

Important Safety

- **No nitrates or poppers** — ever (see above).
- Use caution with **alpha blockers** and other blood-pressure medicines (can add up to dizziness) — your team will space or adjust them.
- If you have **significant heart disease**, confirm with your doctor that sex and these pills are safe for you.
- Limit **alcohol**, which adds to dizziness.

Common Side Effects

- Headache, facial **flushing**, stuffy nose, indigestion
- Back or muscle aches (more with tadalafil)
- Temporary **bluish tinge** to vision (sildenafil/vardenafil)

Seek emergency care if you have:

- An erection lasting **more than 4 hours** (priapism)
- **Sudden vision or hearing loss** — stop the pill and seek care
- **Chest pain**, fainting, or severe dizziness

THREE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. PDE5 inhibitors help you get an erection **with arousal** (they don't work on their own); tadalafil also helps prostate urinary symptoms.
2. **Never combine with nitrates or poppers** — the blood-pressure drop can be life-threatening.
3. Seek emergency care for an erection over 4 hours, or sudden vision/hearing loss.