

Erectile dysfunction and heart disease

25 September 2006

It's known that there's an association between heart disease and erectile dysfunction. The link is probably the damage to small arteries and certainly men with heart disease can have problems with sexual performance. But does it cut the other way? Could erectile dysfunction be a warning that the man is silently brewing a heart attack or stroke?

The answer is yes from a prostate cancer prevention trial which followed 19,000 men for seven years asking them about libido and sexual function every three months. About 40 per cent of the men taking a placebo had erectile problems and their subsequent risk of a heart attack, stroke or angina was similar to having a history of high cholesterol, smoking or close family with heart disease.

Erectile dysfunction was a predictor in its own right and added to the risk from say diabetes. So it's a question that GPs should ask of their middle aged male patients and act on the answer if it's yes.

It's not clear whether reducing the heart risk factors will help the erectile dysfunction as well.