

Priapism

Priapism is a ***persistent, painful, penile erection***. It occurs mainly in adolescents and young men BUT can occur at any age, and has been seen in boys as young as age 2 years.

In males with sickle cell disease, there are two main types of priapism:

Stuttering priapism

These are episodes that can last up to 2-3 hours, but that resolve without any medical treatment. They frequently occur at night and may or may not be associated with sexual activity. Often though, there is no obvious trigger. Stuttering priapism can lead to major priapism so it is very important to advise your doctor if this is happening to you.

Major priapism

When a penile erection lasts longer than **4 hours**, it is called a major priapism. An episode of major priapism is an emergency. Because there are often delays getting to a hospital, males with priapism should make their way to an Emergency Room if an episode of priapism has not resolved within 2 hours.

If priapism continues beyond 4 hours, there is an increased risk of permanent damage to the penile structure, which may lead to erectile dysfunction such as impotence.

What can you do if you have an acute attack of priapism?

- Take pain medication e.g. paracetamol, ibuprofen, codeine
- Drink extra fluids
- Take a WARM bath / shower
- Empty your bladder
- Do some gentle exercise (walking around the room, sit-ups)

IF SIMPLE MEASURES AT HOME ARE NOT HELPING AND PRIAPISM IS LASTING LONGER THAN 2 HOURS, GO TO YOUR NEAREST HOSPITAL IMMEDIATELY.

REMEMBER:

- Prolonged episodes can lead to erectile dysfunction, such as impotence, in the future.
- Prevention of episodes can be difficult; however, if you or your child is having stuttering episodes, let your doctor know as soon as possible. There are medications that may be able to control these episodes and so prevent a major attack.