

# Urinary, bowel and sexual health in older men from Northern Ireland

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## **Main findings**

- Among men aged 60 and over from Northern Ireland (NI) 9% reported urinary problems, 7% reported bowel problems and 33% reported sexual problems.
- These problems all increased with increasing age, number of long-term health conditions, obesity and lack of physical activity.

## **What we already know**

Prostate cancer survivors can experience urinary, bowel and sexual problems after treatment. These problems also occur in the general population as a result of age or other health problems. In order to help assess the impact of treatment on the quality of life of prostate cancer, up to date information on these conditions in the general population is required.

## **What did we do?**

A survey of 10,000 older men was conducted in NI by post during late 2016. These men were asked questions on their general health as well as questions relating to urinary, bowel and sexual problems. Further information on the characteristics of these men was asked such as age, marital status, height, weight, physical activity level and whether they experienced a range of specific long-term medical conditions (e.g. heart condition, high blood pressure, diabetes). Using this data we report on the frequency of urinary, bowel and sexual problems in the NI population and investigate how these conditions vary by the attributes of older men.

## **What did we find?**

One in three men aged 60 and over reported sexual problems to a moderate or big degree, while one in eleven reported urinary problems, and one in fourteen reported bowel problems. In all, two out of five men reported at least one of these problems and one in fifty reported all three. These problems were associated with increasing number of long-term medical conditions, low physical activity levels, higher body mass index (BMI) and unemployment. Urinary and sexual problems also increased with increasing age.

On a scale of 0 to 100, where 100 is the best possible health, men reported an average score of 77. Health declined with a range of factors: increasing age, living in deprived or urban areas, unemployment, and greater number of long-term medical conditions, obesity and lack of physical activity. Men reporting urinary, bowel and/or sexual problems were also more likely to report poorer general health.

## **How will these results be used?**

These data provide an insight into sensitive issues seldom reported by elderly men, but could be addressed given adequate service provision. The relationship between urinary, bowel and sexual problems, BMI and physical activity offers the prospect of additional health gain by addressing public health issues such as obesity. The results also illustrate that these problems are not uncommon among the older male population. This will facilitate better understanding of the impact of surgery, radiotherapy and hormone therapy on the quality of life of prostate cancer survivors and help redress any overvaluation of the potential side effects of these treatments.