

# FEATURES

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## Recreational use of Viagra is ridiculous, doctor says

Dr. Vasti Broadstone, a Louisville endocrinologist, is conducting clinical trials with 14 diabetic men to see how well Viagra works for them.

So far, it has been doing a great job.

"We've had a 90 percent response," Broadstone said, adding that most of those in her study are "tremendously pleased" with the results.

Broadstone, an associate professor of medicine at the University of Louisville School of Medicine, says Viagra is fine for many men who have

### HEALTH BY DICK KAUKAS

"erectile dysfunction," or impotence.

"E.D." affects about half of all men who have diabetes. It also causes nerve damage, so these men are logical subjects for the ongoing study, Broadstone said.

But Broadstone shakes her head at those who may be tempted to pop

Viagra for recreational rather than therapeutic purposes, hoping that it will improve their already satisfactory sex lives.

The highly publicized prescription drug came on the market in late March and has been taken by more than a million men since then.

Broadstone's basic, common-sense message is that you shouldn't try to fix what isn't broken.

"It's ridiculous," she said. "If everything's working, you don't need to take it. You don't put stuff you don't need in your mouth. You don't take a

Tylenol if you don't have a headache. Viagra's not an enhancer; it's an enabler."

However, there are a few men out there who remain unconvinced and still are interested in taking Viagra to enhance their performance.

If you're tempted when a friend offers to let you try a couple of the little blue, diamond-shaped pills that sell for \$10 apiece, or if you have some and think your wife or girlfriend should see what they do for her, there are a couple of things you should carefully consider before you

plunge ahead:

■ The clinical trials that were done before Viagra was approved for prescription sales involved only men with erectile dysfunction, caused by everything from depression to prostate surgery.

Although you can theorize that if the drug increases blood flow to the penis for men with erectile dysfunction, it is bound to do the same for men without erectile dysfunction,

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## Viagra is for men who need it and isn't for recreational use

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there's no research that has been done to document that.

■ Although a study in Europe is looking at how Viagra works for women, the clinical trials done in the United States involved only men. So at this point, there's no way to know for sure how the drug may interact with medications women may be taking, or what, if any, effect it may have on such things as cancer rates. So women who try Viagra because they've heard stories about its effectiveness may be exposing themselves to unknown risks.

■ Like other medications, Viagra has side effects, some of them serious.

Pfizer Inc., the New York pharmaceutical company that makes and profits from Viagra, has acknowledged that at least three men who were taking Viagra died as a result of heart attacks or strokes after they had sex.

Three other deaths were blamed on using Viagra while also taking nitrate medications, often prescribed to treat chest pain in heart patients. The combination may make blood pressure drop suddenly and dramatically.

Pfizer pointed out that Viagra labels already warn against combining Viagra with nitrates and of cardiac risk associated with sex, and advise physicians to consider those risks when prescribing Viagra.

■ Because Viagra is so new,

there's no way to know for sure what, if any, long-term side effects it may have.

The American Academy of Ophthalmology said last month that long-term research was needed to determine if Viagra causes any permanent changes in vision.

About 3 percent of men who took Viagra in the clinical trials reported that it impaired their ability to distinguish blues from greens, and made their eyes sensitive to light.

"On the surface, seeing the world with a bluish tinge may just be annoying," said Dr. Michael F. Marmor, a spokesman for the academy. But because there may be unknown

effects on vision, he continued, "stay at the lowest dose level possible."

Finally, make sure your doctor checks your file and talks to you about Viagra before you get a prescription. That way, you'll know what the possible side effects are, and you'll also have a chance to discuss alternative methods of therapy.

For example, tests might show that low testosterone levels need to be treated first, so that Viagra can have its full impact.

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