

fast facts

viagra

■ **Overview:** What goes up, must come down. It's an old story, but never more unwelcome than today, as legions of baby-boomer males (and even post-baby-boomers) confront their declining virility and sexual potency. That's why Viagra® turned into pharmaceutical gold as soon as it hit pharmacies in 1998. Then it went platinum, as Viagra became a franchise builder for Internet pharmacies. And faster than you can say "sex-stasy," Viagra was on the recreational drug map, as both gay and straight revelers adopted it as a way of reversing the effects of ecstasy, amphetamines, and other drugs known to impair sexual function.



■ **Appearance:** Blue, diamond-shaped tablets, with "25," "50," or "100" embossed on one side, denoting tablet strength.

■ **Actions/Effects:** Viagra works by dilating blood vessels throughout the body, allowing blood to flow more readily to the heart, lungs and other organs. In addition, Viagra relaxes smooth muscle contractions in the penis. About 70 percent of men using it report some improvement in achieving and maintaining an erection. Effects usually begin within 30 minutes, and last about 4 hours.



■ **Risks/Side Effects:** Side effects include headache, flushed skin, and anxiety. More serious risks can include distorted vision and priapism—a painful, prolonged erection that may require medical intervention. After 69 deaths were linked to Viagra during its first three months on the market, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration issued a warning against using it with amyl nitrate (“poppers”), nitroglycerin, and nitrous oxide. Since each dilates blood vessels, a dangerous drop in blood pressure can result, leading to possible heart attack or stroke. Also, those taking protease inhibitors should not use Viagra without consulting a physician.

■ **Medical Uses:** In addition to its primary uses, Viagra is being tested against pulmonary hypertension in children and infertility in women.

■ **Trends:** Viagra was quickly adopted by users of ecstasy (and other club drugs known to decrease sexual performance), a combination the media quickly dubbed “sex-tasy.” Health officials warn that men who take Viagra with alcohol or drugs are more likely to indulge in unsafe sex. In a study of 844 male patients in San Francisco, 32% of gays and 7% of straight men who reported using Viagra were more likely to have multiple sexual partners and to have contracted a sexually-transmitted disease than men who had not used it.



■ **Demographics:** On the heels of its fast start, Viagra was soon joined on the prescription-drug hit parade by act-alike drugs Levitra® and Cialis®. Cumulatively, the drugs accounted for more than 16.7 million U.S. prescriptions in 2005.



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