

Tips for Healthy Sexuality in Older Age

Listed below are some tips that may help in adjusting to sexuality with age.

Be willing to talk about making love with your partner, and compliment your partner on his or her strengths.

Think about timing: know when your peak sexual time is, slow sex down, and prolong foreplay.

Set the stage for intimacy, such as by avoiding heavy meals before sex, turning off the TV, and playing soft music.

Discuss your sexual concerns with your doctor and, if applicable, ask your doctor whether medications may help with any specific concerns. Also, if you are taking any medications, ask your doctor how these may affect your sexual functioning.

Increase physical comfort and arousal by using artificial lubricants and maximizing direct genital stimulation. Experiment with alternative sexual techniques to discover what is most pleasurable to you and your partner.

Keep up your overall physical and mental health, such as by increasing your physical activity level and modifying unhelpful beliefs about your sexuality.



RESOURCES

Bradford, A., & Meston, C. (2007). Senior sexual health: The effects of aging on sexuality. In VandeCreek, L., Peterson, F. L., & Bley, J. W. (Eds.), *Innovations in clinical practice: Focus on sexual health*. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press.

Camacho, M.E. & Reyes-Ortiz, C.A. (2005). Sexual dysfunction in the elderly: Age or disease? *International Journal of Impotence Research*, 17, S52-S56.

Davis, L. (2007). Golden sexuality: Sex therapy for seniors. In VandeCreek, L., Peterson, F. L., & Bley, J. W. (Eds.), *Innovations in clinical practice: Focus on sexual health*. Sarasota, FL: Professional Resource Press.

Lindau, S. T., Schumm, L. P., Laumann, E. O., Levinson, W., O'Muircheartaigh, C. A., & Waite, L. J. (2007). A study of sexuality and health among older adults in the United States. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 357, 762-774.

Pangman, V. & Seguire, M. (2000). Sexuality and the chronically ill older adult: A social justice issue. *Sexuality and Disability*, 18, 49-59.

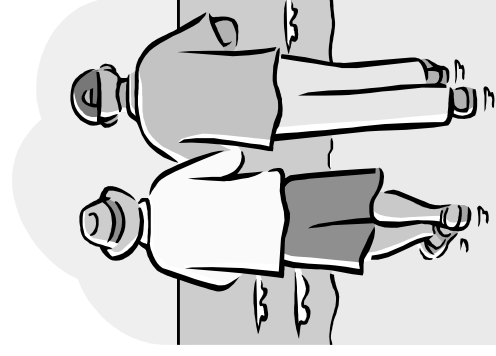
Web-sites:

- <http://www.webmd.com/healthy-aging/tc/sexuality-and-physical-changes-with-aging-sexually-transmitted-diseases>
- <http://www.nia.nih.gov/HealthInformation/Publications/hiv-aids.htm>
- <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/sexual-health/HA00035/NSECTIONGROUP=2>
- http://stroke.about.com/od/caregiverresources/a/sex_and_stroke.htm
- <http://americanheart.org/presenter.jhtml?identifier=9065>
- <http://www.aboutjoints.com/physicianinfo/topics/hiprehab.htm>
- http://www.orthop.washington.edu/uw/livingwith/tabID__337/ItemID__99/PageID__152/Articles/Default.aspx

This brochure was created by graduate students in the Fall 2009 semester of CED 691: Advanced Clinical Topics in Couple and Family Counseling: Sexuality Counseling in the Department of Counseling and Educational Development at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

STILL GREAT AT SIXTY-EIGHT... AND BEYOND

Aging and Sexual Health



An electronic version of this brochure is available at the following web-site:

http://www.uncg.edu/ced/still_great.html

Background

Sexuality is a healthy aspect of aging. Included in this brochure are some statistics, tips, and considerations for adjusting to the unique circumstances of sexuality while growing older.

Statistics About Aging and Sexuality

Lindau et al. (2007) found in a national survey of 3,005 older adults:

Healthy Sexuality is Important

- 66% of men and 48% of women aged 45 and older felt that a satisfying sex life is important to their quality of life
- 52% of men and 49% of women reported being satisfied with their sex lives

Older Adults are Still Sexually Active

- 67% of men and 40% of women aged 65 to 74 are sexually active, with 65% engaging in sex at least 2 to 3 times per month
- 39% of men and 17% of women aged 75 to 85 are sexually active, with 54% engaging in sex at least 2 to 3 times per month
- 30% of men and women aged 65 to 74 reported avoiding sex because of sexual problems
- 26% of men and 23% of women aged 75 to 85 reported avoiding sex because of sexual problems

Specific Concerns

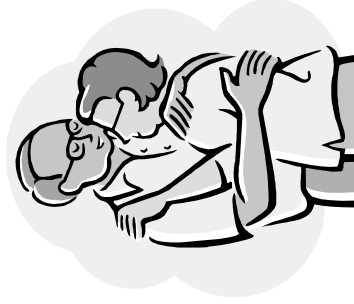
Sexuality in Assisted Living Facilities

Sexuality in assisted living facilities is not widely discussed; however, the conversation is being raised more often as studies show that many seniors are sexually active. Many assisted living facilities allow overnight stays for spouses and family members of residents. Also, most assisted living facilities allow their residents to spend the night with spouses/family members. When researching an assisted living facility, ask about their specific policy on overnight visitation.

HIV/AIDS and other STIs

Many older adults think that HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) only affect young people.

However, according to the National Institute on Aging, adults over the age of 50 represent one-quarter of Americans living with HIV/AIDS. Older adults might be more susceptible to contracting STIs due to weaker immune systems, which



makes it harder to fight off disease. It is always important to practice safer sex by using a condom and a lubricant. Also, talk to your doctor about ways to protect yourself from STIs. Speak openly with your partner about his/her sexual history and HIV and STI status.

Viagra: Deal Maker or Deal Breaker?

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is a common condition for men as they age. For many, drugs such as Viagra, Cialis, or Levitra offer an effective treatment for ED. However, these medications are not the best option for everyone. Individual physiology, causes of ED, and adjustments in intimate relationships must be considered when selecting a treatment. Thorough discussion with your healthcare provider will help determine if these drugs are right for your physical condition. Honest and thoughtful discussion with your partner will help you know if these drugs are right for your relationship.

“I Don’t Bend That Way Anymore”

Physical limitations due to illness, surgery, and injury can make physical intimacy a challenge. Partners may be fearful of causing or experiencing pain or injury during lovemaking. Acknowledge your fears and concerns. Share them with your partner. Together, discover new ways of expressing affection, sexual desire, and physical and emotional intimacy. Be creative—pillows, props, new positions, and honest communication can help you stay connected as your bodies change.

