

Aging and Intimacy

Some people believe you lose the desire to have sex with older age. That's not true! Many older adults still want to have healthy sex lives. Normal changes to your body as you age and other issues may make it harder to enjoy sex. This handout will discuss these issues, as well as review ways to promote a healthy sex life.

Normal Changes that Occur with Age

Women: The vagina can become narrow, shorter, and less flexible with age. Also, as women age, they lose natural lubricant. These changes can make certain types of sex more painful.

Men: It may take longer to have an erection. It may not be as firm or as large as it was when they were younger. Men lose an erection more quickly after an orgasm. It may also take longer to have another erection after sex.

Other Changes

There are other things that can make it harder to have and enjoy sex. These include:

- Medical conditions, such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, and depression
- Surgeries that affect the breasts or genitals, for both men and women
- Medicines, such as those for your mood or blood pressure

Your emotions can also affect your desire to have sex. You might also feel less attractive. If you are stressed, worried, or upset about something, it can make it harder to enjoy sex.

Older adults are still at risk for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Your risk is highest if you or your partner has more than one sexual partner or you are having unprotected sex. Talk to your doctor about ways you can protect yourself.

What can you do?

- Talk to your doctor about any questions or concerns you may have about your sex life. They can help you address any issues that affect your sex life.
- Take good care of yourself. This means taking care of any medical conditions that could affect your sex.
- Share your concerns with your partner. You might find that they have the same concerns.
- It may help to talk with a therapist, with or without your partner. Some therapists are trained in helping older adults maintain a healthy sex life.
- Women may find it helpful to use a water-based lubricant during sex.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person's health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 4/2019 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#5719.