

# Suggestions for People with **Chronic Illness**

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Illness can have a devastating effect on sexuality. Body image, sexual self-esteem, and intimate relationships may be threatened. Your health care providers may not address these issues and it can be embarrassing to bring them up yourself. It can be difficult to bring this up with a partner, as well.

The following suggestions can help you deal openly with the problems that may come up as a result of chronic illness. They can also help you explore a variety of ways to continue enjoying yourself as a sexual person.

1. Remember that you are still a sexual person but might need to explore new ways to enjoy your sexuality.
2. Do not be discouraged! It will take time to unlearn old ways of thinking and acting.
3. Check yourself out: are you focused on *performance* rather than *pleasure*? Are you *goal-oriented* rather than *pleasure-oriented*? If so, it's time for a change!
4. Remember that many people have sexual problems because of incorrect information and assumptions about the effect of their illness. Get the facts. Then figure out what actions you can take.
5. Talk with your physician about common sexual issues for people with your condition. If your primary clinician is unable to help, look further. A session or two with a sexuality counselor may be exactly what you need.
6. Realize that medications for chronic illness may affect sexual desire and response. Ask your physician about substituting or reducing a medication.
7. Talk with your partner about your feelings, your fears, and your desires. What used to seem like a natural, sexual progression may now need careful planning.
8. Plan for sexual activity when you and your partner are rested and not distracted.
9. Remember there are many pleasurable and satisfying sexual activities that do not involve intercourse.
10. If possible, join a support group and talk with others who have the same physical problems. Ask them what adjustments have helped them.
11. If you have vaginal dryness, try a lubricant. This problem – causing pain and distress for many women – is often relieved by lubricants from the local pharmacy.
12. Be adventurous: read books, browse the web, experiment with new sexual positions and sexual aids such as vibrators.