

Adapting to the Changes

Sex will change as you get older – but it does not have to become less enjoyable. In fact, sex often gets better as a couple ages. In many ways, men and women are more equally matched. Most men will have lost their earlier physical urgency for sexual satisfaction and many women feel more confident and comfortable with their sexuality. What's more, you're both likely to know far more about your own and each other's bodies.

What's important is that you and your partner are both aware of the physical changes that are happening (see *Suggested Resources*), and that you're willing to accommodate those differences into your love making style.

Communicate with your partner:

Even though it may feel uncomfortable, talk to your partner openly and honestly about your sexual relationship.

- Discuss the changes you're both going through and what each of you can do to adapt to these changes.
- If you think there is a problem in your relationship, don't ignore it. Ignoring problems or pretending they will go away can lead to a breakdown in communication and intimacy.
- Arrange times for you and your partner to be alone and to spend time together.

Make changes to your routine:

Simple changes can improve your sex life. But discuss them with your partner first. Neither person should feel pressured into doing something s/he is not comfortable with.

- Try different positions and new times of the day – like having sex in the morning when you both may have more energy.
- It might take longer for you to become aroused so take more time to set the stage for romance. Go out for dinner or an evening of dancing; take a walk or go to the gym together. The activity doesn't matter - the important thing is connecting with each other.
- If acceptable, explore new ways to give sexual pleasure to each other or yourself. Try a new sexual position – you might find one that is more fun or more comfortable for you and your partner.

Manage your expectations:

If you didn't have sex very often as a younger adult, don't expect to have lots of sex as an older adult. Maybe you and your partner express intimacy in other ways. People who enjoyed frequent sex when they were younger are more likely to continue a similar pattern as they age.

Be patient – both men and women may notice that it takes longer to become sexually aroused than when they were younger. More touching may be needed to become fully

aroused. NOTE: This increase in time to reach arousal is usually not related to a *lack of interest in your partner*.

If you do notice that you are generally less interested in sex than before, look at what factors may be involved. For example, sex drive at any age can be decreased by stress, fatigue, depression, or other lifestyle factors like smoking or drug/alcohol use. The impact on a person's sexual interest and responsiveness is greater as s/he gets older.

Loss of sex drive or difficulty with sexual arousal can also be a side effect of medication that has been prescribed for you. DO NOT stop taking this medication on your own - talk to your doctor. Often the doctor will be able to adjust the dose or switch to another equally effective medication that does not have this side effect.

Take care of yourself:

- A balanced diet (with plenty of fruits and vegetables) and regular exercise keep your body finely tuned. This keeps you ready for sex at any age.
- Try to reduce the stress in your life.
- Keep a positive outlook on life.
- Get involved in activities or hobbies that interest you.
- Avoid alcohol, as excessive use decreases sexual function in both men and women. Drugs such as marijuana and cocaine can also impair sexual function.

Is body image an issue?

Our youth oriented world often makes people "feel old" or less attractive in their older body.

- If body image issues are getting in the way of your ability to enjoy physical intimacy, talk about this with your partner or a counselor, if necessary.
- Focus on your strengths. Remember that your appearance is only one aspect of who you are as a person.
- Be creative in finding ways to make yourself *feel* more attractive. For example, take a little extra time with your grooming, put on a touch of your favourite perfume/cologne or colour your hair, if this is important to you.

Talk to your doctor if you have concerns:

You might be embarrassed to discuss sex with your doctor. But conversations with your doctor can help you understand the changes your body is going through as you age and how these changes affect your sexual activity.

Doctors, themselves, sometimes feel uncomfortable asking a patient about their sexual relationships. If this is the case, it is important to introduce the topic yourself by asking questions and being specific about any concerns you have.