

Sex and Aging: Talking About Sex



Judging by magazines and TV, doesn't it seem that only young people have sex? Well, you know better. As you grow older, your sex life may change. But that doesn't mean it has to end.

Why talk about sex?

Talking with your partner can improve your relationship and your sex life. And discussing your sexual activity with your healthcare provider is the only way to get treatment for medical problems that may affect your sex life. Talking about sex may feel awkward. Try writing down questions or concerns you have. This can help you get a discussion started.



Your health can affect your sex life

Age can sometimes bring health problems. And conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, stroke, cancer, menopause, depression, arthritis, and high blood pressure can cause changes that affect your sex life. Certain medicines can affect sex, too. Be open and honest with your healthcare provider about any problems you're having.

Your healthcare provider may be able to help if you:

- Have pain during sex
- Have vaginal dryness
- Can't have an erection
- Can't have an orgasm
- Have developed a sexual problem after starting to take a new medicine
- Have a physical problem that prevents you from enjoying sex
- Have no interest in sex

There are many possible treatments for these medical causes. These include lubricants or estrogen for vaginal dryness, the most common cause of sexual problems in older women. Other options are medicines for erectile dysfunction, the most common cause in men. Medicines or counseling can also help with lack of sexual desire or other concerns about sex.

Talking with your partner

If you have a concern about your sex life, it affects your partner, too. So you need to talk about it. Just getting a problem out in the open can go a long way toward solving it.

You may want to talk about:

- What you do and don't enjoy
- How to work around a physical problem
- Ways to be intimate other than sex
- Whether to get medical care for a problem
- How condoms can protect you and your partner from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Getting back into the dating game

It's not uncommon these days for older adults to find themselves single again. If the last time you were single was a long time ago, you may wonder if the rules have changed. It's true that some things have changed. When you were young, you may not have thought much about STIs, including HIV/AIDS. These days, a sexually active person needs to learn about STIs, and know how to avoid getting them. This includes using a condom if you have more than one sexual partner.

But some things haven't changed. As always, you decide what you will and won't do. This includes deciding whether to have sex and, if so, under what conditions.

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