



Figure 8.14: Medical Check-ups are Important for Men. Source.

Men during middle adulthood may also experience prostate enlargement, which can interfere with urination, and deficient testosterone levels which decline throughout adulthood, but especially after age 50. If testosterone levels decline significantly, it is referred to as andropause or late-onset hypogonadism. Identifying whether testosterone levels are low is difficult because individual blood levels vary greatly. Low testosterone is not a concern unless it accompanied by negative symptoms such as low sex drive, ED, fatigue, loss of muscle, loss of body hair, or breast enlargement. Low testosterone is also associated with medical conditions, such as diabetes, obesity, high blood pressure, and testicular cancer. The effectiveness of supplemental testosterone is mixed, and long term testosterone replacement therapy for men can increase the risk of prostate cancer, blood clots, heart attack and stroke (WebMD, 2016). Most men with low testosterone do not have related problems (Berkeley Wellness, 2011).

The Climacteric and Sexuality

Sexuality is an important part of people's lives at any age, and many older adults are very interested in staying sexually active (Dimah & Dimah, 2004). According to the National Survey of Sexual Health and Behavior (NSSHB) (Center for Sexual Health Promotion, 2010), 74% of males and 70% of females aged 40-49 engaged in vaginal intercourse during the previous year, while 58% of males and 51% of females aged 50-59 did so.



Figure 8.15. Source.

Despite these percentages indicating that middle adults are sexually active, age-related physical changes can affect sexual functioning. For women, decreased sexual desire and pain during vaginal intercourse because of menopausal changes have been identified (Schick et al., 2010). A woman may also notice less vaginal lubrication during arousal which can affect overall pleasure (Carroll, 2016). Men may require more direct stimulation for an erection and the erection may be delayed or less firm (Carroll, 2016). As previously discussed men may experience erectile dysfunction or experience a medical conditions (such as diabetes or heart disease) that impact sexual functioning. Couples can continue to enjoy physical intimacy and may engage in more foreplay, oral sex, and other forms of sexual expression rather than focusing as much on sexual intercourse.

Risk of pregnancy continues until a woman has been without menstruation for at least 12 months, however, and couples should continue to use contraception. People continue to be at risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, such as genital herpes, chlamydia, and genital warts. In 2014, 16.7% of the country's new HIV diagnoses (7,391 of 44,071) were among people 50 and older, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014e). This was an increase from 15.4% in 2005. Practicing safe sex is important at any age, but unfortunately adults over the age of 40 have the lowest rates of condom use (Center for Sexual Health Promotion, 2010). This low rate of condom use suggests the need to enhance education efforts for older individuals regarding STI risks and prevention. Hopefully, when partners understand how aging affects sexual expression, they will be less likely to misinterpret these changes as a lack of sexual interest or displeasure in the partner and more able to continue to have satisfying and safe sexual relationships.

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