

Staying Active: Sex and Seniors

Older adults can enjoy a fulfilling sex life that many younger people would envy. Free from the possibility of pregnancy and devoid of work or money pressures that may dampen desire, retirees can focus more on the physical pleasures of intimacy and the emotional connections that foster it. However, there are some important considerations that seniors who want an active sex life should keep in mind.

Biological changes – As hormone levels decline with age meaning that physical arousal may take longer for both men and women. Erectile dysfunction (ED) —the inability to have and keep an erection—is more common as men age. Occasional bouts of ED are normal but if it occurs often, a talk with your Care N’ Care doctor can help lead to appropriate treatment. Women may experience discomfort during sex due to diminished lubrication or a thinning or narrowing of the vaginal walls. Over-the-counter lubricants can help, as can creams that deliver small amounts of estrogen directly in the vagina.

Health issues - Some common health issues can impact the ability to have and enjoy sex. People with arthritis or chronic pain may find sexual contact uncomfortable. Diabetes can cause ED in men and chronic yeast infections in women. Heart disease can inhibit blood flow and may delay arousal, or make it more difficult to achieve orgasm. Some medications may also cause sexual difficulties, such as blood pressure medications, antihistamines, tranquilizers and antidepressants.

Emotional connection – Time and maturity change everyone over the years, and that includes the desire and ability for sex. There are many ways to

be intimate, and couples should be honest about changes in their libido and sexual preferences. In some cases an emotional connection may be more important and fulfilling than physical responses, and sexual intercourse is not the only activity that can be satisfying.

Safe sex – Anyone, of any age, is at risk for contracting sexually transmitted diseases or HIV if he or she engages in unprotected sex. Sexually active seniors who are not engaged in a mutually monogamous relationship should use condoms during sex that involves penetration.

Finding Companionship – Seniors who are alone but interested in finding companionship have many opportunities, such as volunteering or at faith-based activities, continuing education classes, and senior-only fitness classes, dating sites and meetup groups. Making new friends and forging new relationships may be all the stimulation one needs to enjoy new experiences that are fulfilling in their own way... An internet search can also reveal an array of senior social groups in the area. In Dallas, one senior social group portal can be found here: www.meetup.com/topics/seniors-social/us/tx/dallas/

Remember: Many people enjoy a fulfilling sex life in their senior years. By keeping in mind how the physical act of intimacy changes as we age, people of any age can find new ways to enjoy sex and the emotional connections it creates.

