



## Better Sex as You Age

Tips for Enjoying a Healthy Sex Life as You Get Older



Sex can be a powerful emotional experience and a great tool for protecting or improving health, and it's certainly not only for the young. Sex over the age of 50 can present challenges, and you may feel discouraged by issues connected with the aging process, but these problems are not insurmountable. With better understanding and an open mind, you can continue to enjoy a physically and emotionally fulfilling sex life—it's not a question of age, but of desire.

### Good sex at any age

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The need for intimacy is ageless. And studies now confirm that no matter what your gender, you can enjoy sex for as long as you wish. Naturally, sex at 70 or 80 may not be like it is at 20 or 30—but in some ways it can be better. As an older adult, you may feel wiser than you were in your earlier years, and know what works best for you when it comes to your sex life. Older people often have a great deal more self-confidence and self-awareness, and feel released from the unrealistic ideals of youth and prejudices of others. And with children grown and work less demanding, couples are better able to relax and enjoy one another without the old distractions.

For a number of reasons, though, many adults worry about sex in their later years, and end up turning away from sexual encounters. Some older adults feel embarrassed, either by their aging bodies or by their “performance,” while others are affected by illness or loss of a partner. Without accurate information and an open mind, a temporary situation can turn into a permanent one. You can avoid letting this happen by being proactive. Whether

you're seeking to restart or improve your sex life, it's important to be ready to try new things, and to ask for professional help if necessary. There is much you can do to compensate for the normal changes that come with aging. With proper information and support, your later years can be an exciting time to explore both the emotional and sensual aspects of your sexuality.

### Benefits of sex as you age

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As an older adult, the two things that may have brought the greatest joy—children and career—may no longer be as prevalent in your everyday life. Personal relationships often take on a greater significance, and sex can be an important way of connecting. Sex has the power to:

- **Improve mental and physical health.** Sex can burn fat, cause the brain to release endorphins, and drastically reduce anxiety.
- **Increase lifespan.** Through its health-improving benefits, a good sex life can add years to your life.
- **Solidify relationships.** Sex is a chance to express the closeness of your deepest relationship.
- **Give refuge.** Sex gives you a chance to escape from the sometimes harsh realities of the world.

### Accept and celebrate who you are

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Sex in later life may not be the same as it was in your youth—but that doesn't have to be a bad thing. In fact, sex can be more enjoyable than ever. As you find yourself embracing your older identity, you can:

**Reap the benefits of experience.** The independence and self-confidence that comes with age can be very attractive to your spouse or potential partners. No matter your gender, you may feel better about your body at 62 or 72 than you did at 22. And it is likely that you now know more about yourself and what makes you excited and happy. Your experience and self-possession can make your sex life exciting for you and your partner.

**Look ahead.** As you age, try to let go of expectations for your sex life. Do your best to avoid dwelling on how things are different. If you enjoyed an active sex life in your younger years, there's no reason to slow down with age, unless you want to. A positive attitude and open mind can go a long way toward improving your sex life as you age.

**Love and appreciate your older self.** Naturally, your body is going through changes as you age. You look and feel differently than you did when you were younger. But if you can accept these changes as natural and hold your head up high, you'll not only feel better, you'll also be more attractive to others. Confidence and honesty garner the respect of others—and can be sexy and appealing.

### Good sex as you age is safe sex as you age

As an older adult, you need to be just as careful as younger people when having sex with a new partner. You may not be able to get pregnant, but you're still susceptible to sexually transmitted diseases. Talk to your partner, and protect yourself.

## Communicate with your partner

As bodies and feelings change as you grow older, it's more important than ever to communicate your thoughts, fears, and desires with your partner. Encourage your partner to communicate fully with you, too. Speaking openly about sex may not come easily to you, but improving your communication will help both of you feel closer, and can make sex more pleasurable.

### Talking about sex

Broaching the subject of sex can be difficult for some people, but it should get easier once you begin. And as an added bonus, you may find that just *talking* about sex can make you feel sexy. Try the following strategies as you begin the conversation.

**Be playful.** Being playful can make communication about sex a lot easier. Use humor, gentle teasing, and even tickling to lighten the mood.

**Be honest.** Honesty fosters trust and relaxes both partners—and can be very attractive. Let your partner know how you are feeling and what you hope for in a sex life.

**Discuss new ideas.** If you want to try something new, discuss it with your partner, and be open to his or her ideas, too. The senior years—with more time and fewer distractions—can be a time of creativity and passion.

**Modernize.** You may belong to a generation in which sex was a taboo subject. But talking openly about your needs, desires, and concerns with your partner can make you closer—and help you both enjoy sex and intimacy.

## Focus on intimacy and physical touch

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A good sex life—at any age—involves a lot more than just sex. It's also about intimacy and touch, things anyone can benefit from. Even if you have health problems or physical disabilities, you can engage in intimate acts and benefit from closeness with another person. Take the pressure off by putting aside your old ideas of what sex “should be.” Focus instead on the importance of tenderness and contact.

### Taking your time

Without pressing workloads or young children to worry about, many older adults have far more time to devote to pleasure and intimacy. Use your time to become more intimate.

**Stretch your experience.** Start with a romantic dinner—or breakfast—before lovemaking. Share romantic or erotic literature and poetry. Having an experience together, sexual or not, is a powerful way of connecting intimately.

**Don't be shy.** Hold hands and touch your partner often, and encourage him or her to touch you. Tell your partner what you love about him/her, and share your ideas about new sexual experiences you might have together.

**Relax.** Find something that relaxes both partners, whether it's trying massage or baths together. Relaxation fosters confidence and comfort, and can help both erectile and dryness problems.

### Expanding your definition of sex

Sexuality necessarily takes on a broader definition as we age. Try to open up to the idea that sex can mean many things, and that closeness with a partner can be expressed in many ways.

**It's not just about intercourse.** Sex can also be about emotional pleasure, sensory pleasure, and relationship pleasure. Intercourse is only one way to have fulfilling sex. Touching, kissing, and other intimate sexual contact can be just as rewarding for both you and your partner.

**Natural changes.** As you age, it's normal for you and your partner to have different sexual abilities and needs. Find new ways to enjoy sexual contact and intimacy. You may have intercourse less often than you used to, but the closeness and love you feel will remain.

## Find what works for you

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You might not be as comfortable with some sexual positions as you once were, but that doesn't mean you need to give up an activity that is pleasurable for you—and miss out on feeling close to your partner. Keep in mind that it's not all about intercourse or recreating the way things were when you were younger. The key to a great sex life is finding out what works for you now. Sex as you age may call for some creativity. Use the following ideas as inspiration, but don't be afraid to come up with your own.

**Experiment.** Try sexual positions that you both find comfortable and pleasurable, taking changes into account. For men, if erectile dysfunction is an issue, try sex with the woman on top, as hardness is less important. For women, using lubrication can help.

**Expand what sex means.** Holding each other, gentle touching, kissing, and sensual massage are all ways to share passionate feelings. Try oral sex or masturbation as fulfilling substitutes to intercourse.

**Change your routine.** Simple, creative changes can improve your sex life. Change the time of day when you have sex to a time when you have more energy. For example, try being intimate in the morning rather than at the end of a long day.

**Foreplay.** Because it might take longer for you or your partner to become aroused, take more time to set the stage for romance, such as a romantic dinner or an evening of dancing. Or try connecting first by extensive touching or kissing.

**Playfulness.** Being playful with your partner is important for a good sex life at any age, but can be especially helpful as you age. Tease or tickle your partner—whatever it takes to have fun. With the issues you may be facing physically or emotionally, [play may be the ticket to help you both relax](/articles/relationships-communication/managing-conflicts-with-humor.htm) (/articles/relationships-communication/managing-conflicts-with-humor.htm).

## Restarting a stalled sex drive

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Some older adults give up having a sex life due to emotional or medical challenges. But the vast majority of these issues do not have to be permanent. You can restart a stalled sex drive—and get your sex life back in motion. Remember that maintaining a sex life into your senior years is a matter of good health. Try thinking of sex as something that can keep you in shape, both physically and mentally.

### Understanding roadblocks

The path to satisfying sex as you age is not always smooth. Understanding the problems can be an effective first step to finding solutions.

**Emotional obstacles.** Stress, anxiety, and depression can affect your interest in sex and your ability to become aroused. Psychological changes may even interfere with your ability to connect emotionally with your partner.

**Body image.** As you notice more wrinkles or gray hair, or become aware of love handles or cellulite, you may feel less attractive to your partner. These feelings can make sex less appealing, and can cause you to become less interested in sex.

**Low self-esteem.** Changes at work, retirement, or other major life changes may leave you feeling temporarily uncertain about your sense of purpose. This can undermine your self-esteem and make you feel less attractive to others.

**Worry over “performance.”** Worrying about how you will perform, or whether you are worthy of sexual attention from your partner, can lead to impotence in men and lack of arousal or orgasm in women. This may be a problem you have never before had to face.

### Jumpstarting your sex drive

Sex drives can be naturally stalled as you face the realities of aging, but it is possible to overcome these bumps in the road.

**Communicate.** Talk to your partner, or to a friend or counselor, about your issues, whether they're physical or emotional. Explain the anxieties you are feeling, ask for and accept reassurance, and continue the conversation as things come up.

**Just “do it.”** Sex is just as healthy and necessary as exercise and, just like exercise, it may surprise you with pleasure and satisfaction—even if you weren't “in the mood.” So get back into practice. Once you're back in the habit, you'll start to feel better and your sex drive should naturally increase.

**Increase your activity level.** Bumping up your general level of activity will benefit your sex drive by increasing your energy and sense of well-being.

**Let it go.** As much as you can, use your age and experience to be wise and candid with yourself. Let go of your feelings of inadequacy and let yourself enjoy sex as you age.

### Know when to seek help

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No matter what your age, losing your desire for intimacy and touch altogether isn't normal. In fact, loss of interest or function may be signs of a medical problem—one that may be best addressed by a doctor. If something is getting in the way of your desire or ability to have a good sex life, don't let embarrassment keep you from asking your doctor for help. Working with a professional, there is much you can do to improve your sex life.

Keep in mind that anything that affects your general health and well-being can also affect your sexual function. Sexual health can be affected by:

**Medical conditions.** Illnesses that involve the cardiovascular system, high blood pressure, diabetes, hormonal problems, depression, or anxiety can affect sex drive and function. You can talk to your doctor about strategies to combat these issues.

**Medications.** Certain medications can inhibit your sexual response, including your desire for sex, your ability to become aroused and your orgasmic function. You can talk to your doctor about switching to a different medication with fewer sexual side effects.

### Sex after a heart attack

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Many older adults with heart disease—or who've suffered a past heart attack—are less sexually active than they used to be or even stop having sex completely, often fearing that sex may trigger another heart attack. However, for most people it is still possible to enjoy an active sex life with heart disease.

According to a recent study, for every 10,000 people who have sex once a week, only two or three will experience another heart attack, and their risk of dying during sex is extremely low.

- Check with your doctor before resuming sexual activity.
- Participate in a cardiac rehabilitation program to improve your fitness.
- If you can exercise hard enough to work up a light sweat without triggering symptoms, you should be safe to have sex.
- Wait to have sex if you have advanced heart failure, severe valve disease, uncontrolled arrhythmia, unstable angina, unstable or severe heart disease.
- Once your condition is under control, ask your doctor when it's safe to resume sexual activity.

Source: *Harvard Medical School*



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