

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure!

Dialing Up Desire: From “Not Tonight” to “Hot Tonight”

You have the potential to be a better lover now than ever, given your sexual experience, your emotional maturity, and your finely aged body. Yep, that body. The one that may not look, perform or respond the way it once did but which still hungers for and can give you as much or more pleasure than ever.

Many older adults tuck sexual desire away in the back of their mind. Sometimes it's for a short period while they or a partner deal with acute illness or life pressures. Other times, sexual desire gets forgotten because it seems easier to ignore it than to try to get sexual feelings back after a hiatus. If this sounds like you, it may be time dial up your desire and gain emotional, physical and relationship benefits.

Q. My husband and I used to enjoy regular sex, but after reaching menopause, I lost interest. He misses it, and I miss that closeness, but do I miss sex? Not so much.

If you haven't had sex in a long time, it may feel awkward to dive in again, but it's worth a try. Think about what you enjoyed years ago. Kisses? Caresses? Passionate body rubbing? Fantasies? Erotic whispers? Undressing each other? Genital stimulation? Orgasm? Penetration? Oral sex? Cuddling? Tell your husband you'd like to try one of those things, without any pressure to do more. On another day, try something else.

Q. I am embarrassed by my body these days. There are the obvious old-looking parts. But also, I get distracted by my stiff joints that make sex less fun. How can I make sex enjoyable again?

Country singer Trace Adkins has a great song called “One Hot Mama” in which he tells his busy wife to stop trying to look like the girl he married because she's even more attractive to him now than ever before. The same song could be written about a man, since everyone changes with age. The important thing isn't the package but what's in it – your spirit, your sensuality, your desire, and the confidence that comes from saying, “This is my body today, and I deserve to take pleasure in it!”

If you have chronic joint pain, ask your healthcare provider about treatment options and exercise. Tell your provider about all medications and holistic treatments you use. Many drugs lower sexual desire, and there may be alternatives that will work for you. Experiment with sexual activity at different times of the day, when medications have either taken effect or worn off. Try new positions for sexual activity– Need ideas? Request a copy of the Relationships Intimacy and Arthritis booklet from <http://www.rheumatology.org>

Q. I've always been able to get turned on quickly, but lately, I feel like I'm stuck at a simmer instead of reaching a boil. What's up?

It's quite normal for desire and arousal to slow with age, and the good news is that this slower pace can allow you to focus more on little moments of sexual pleasure that ebb and flow to create a satisfying experience. Orgasm needn't be the focus if your objective is sheer enjoyment in your body and its ability to experience pleasure.

Changes in desire may relate to medical problems, medication, stress, fatigue, depression, hormone levels, menopause, and emotional or relationship issues. Your healthcare provider can rule out anything requiring medical attention. If everything checks out OK, and if you (and, if applicable, your partner) are happy with the amount of sexual activity you're having, stop worrying. No “correct” level of desire exists, just like there's no “right number” of times to engage in sexual activity in a given week or month.

If you're unhappy with your sexual desire (or your partner's), take heart that usually, once underlying problems are addressed, you can get your mojo back. A sex therapist can help if your desire concerns are rooted in emotional or relationship issues. If the changes in your level of desire appear less complex, consider these tips:

- Focus on what gives you pleasure. Don't worry about how often or how long you engage in sexual activity. Don't worry what counts as sex. If reading an erotic novel turns you on, enjoy it! If the thought of wrapping yourself around a stripper pole in your bedroom makes you hot, by all means, install a pole. It's your sexual life, and you can define it, desire it, and live it any way you choose.
- Remain receptive to intimate encounters. If your partner suggests having sex and you're not in the mood, ask what your partner had in mind. You may not have the time or energy for a lengthy roll in the sheets, but you might enjoy necking on the sofa, swapping massages, or you stimulating your partner manually or orally, with or without reciprocation.
- Consider when your desire changed. Some men begin losing interest when they start having inconsistent erections or notice that their erections are less rigid. Desire differs from physical function. Men with limited or no erection or ejaculatory function can still enjoy sensual encounters and orgasm. Some women desire less sex during perimenopause and menopause, when hormonal changes lead to less lubrication, tender tissues, moodiness, and fatigue. Your healthcare provider can discuss over-the-counter and prescription options for these symptoms, and a healthy routine for diet, sleep, and exercise will help, too. Usually, menopause-related decreases in desire bump back up in time.
- Shake things up. Did your sexual interludes become boring and predictable? Your former turn-ons may not be exciting enough anymore. Most men need more focused penis stimulation as they age, and women tend to need longer periods of sex play to build excitement and lubrication prior to genital or internal activity.

Q. My partner and I work fulltime in highly stressful jobs, and by the end of the day, it's all we can do to throw dinner together, catch up on email, and fall asleep. We talk about wanting sex, but how do we make it happen?

Couples who have the most satisfying sexual lives enjoy themselves and each other inside *and* outside of the bedroom. Even if your calendars are packed, schedule dates with each other and consider those dates binding—no last-minute cancellations except in true emergencies—because it's important to feel like a priority in each other's life. Focus your dates on discovering things together intellectually and creatively to reignite the sparks that brought you together. Court each other again, and you'll remember why you fell in love. In time, your desire to be physically intimate will increase, too.

Author bio: Melanie Davis, PhD, consults with individuals and couples to help them build sexual knowledge, comfort, and pleasure through the New Jersey Center for Sexual Wellness. <http://www.njsexualwellness.com> Through Honest Exchange LLC, <http://www.honestexchange.com> she helps doctors and educators learn about and talk about sexuality; she also presents on self esteem, body image, and on the sexual impact of cancer, menopause and aging. She is an AASECT-Certified Sexuality Educator.