

Improving Sex During and After Menopause



by Dr. Ruth Neustifter

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Ladies and their partners often fear the onset of menopause for its potential to change not only her body but also how she experiences sexual desire and stimulation. Some women feel increased desire, especially as childrearing and pregnancy responsibilities decrease, but others begin to lose interest and pleasure in their sexuality. Whether you've already faced menopause or you've yet to experience it, this list will help you know what some of the most common concerns are, and how you can keep the love alive! After all, sex doesn't stop at any age and more and more people are sharing their stories of hot and exciting love lives well after 80. In fact, researchers now say that aging itself doesn't have anything to do with a decrease in sex or how much we enjoy it. It's relational concerns, self-images, medical factors and medications that are to blame, many of which we can do something about! See the checklist after the jump:

Menopause may not be the only issue. If you're having sexual concerns that didn't exist before, don't automatically pin it on menopause. Be sure you're getting a good, regular physical and ask your doctor about anything that may be inhibiting your sex life, including prescriptions. Trust me, they've heard the question before and lots worse. That's what they make the big bucks for, to help you live a healthier and happier life! If they're really not someone you can ask, then it's time to consider a new physician.

Don't forget your relationship. Consider recent changes in your relationship that might impact your interest in sex and how good it is for you. Retirement of either partner, for instance, can be quite a big adjustment filled with smiles and frustrations. Talk together, perhaps with a therapist, about relational concerns. Of course, changes in her body and desire level can also cause concerns for both partners. Remember, this is yet another change life has brought you as a couple, and it is neither person's fault.

Your estrogen is down and dryness is up. Estrogens help to keep blood flow up in your vagina and vulva, and make you more responsive to touch. They also help with physical arousal, so many women in this stage of life feel dry and uncomfy during sex or perhaps all of the time. A good water-based moisturizer and lubricant intended for vaginal use can make a world of difference! Don't use lotions or other things with oils and perfume.

They're not good for you there! Vaginal moisturizers are intended for day to day use to increase comfort, and not to reduce friction during intercourse. That's what lubricants are for! Ask your doctor or pharmacist for recommendations, or experiment with quality over-the-counter products. Yes brand lubricant has been recommended for both purposes, and Exploring Intimacy also recommends it as our favorite product for lubrication, especially for sensitive skin. You can also ask for topical and other forms of estrogen from your doctor. This may be especially good for women who are experiencing a severe thinning or erosion of the vaginal walls. HRT (hormone replacement therapy) can be a great option for many women, returning their sex lives to where they were in as little as a month or two. It has been controversial, although much of that was poor research, so check in with your doctor on where things stand.

Now is a great time to get a little naughty, or a little extra cuddly. Be creative in how you define "sex." There is no need to limit it to intercourse, after all. Part of the reason many of us had wilder, more passionate sex when we were young is because we were exploring every possible avenue for pleasure. Whether you loved that time or missed out it, now is a great excuse to try that approach with your lover/s. Incorporate some sexy videos, share fantasies, try new ways of touching and different positions. Anything that can bring you more pleasure can be a way to get more turned on, and more interested. No one likes boring or uncomfortable sex, regardless of age. If your clitoral sensitivity is down, you can speak to your doctor as well as try lube (see the tip above) and new ways of relaxing and stimulating your body. Remember, it's about getting the glow, not racing to the goal.

Be kind to your urethra. Some women find that they get more bladder infections after menopause. Ask your doctor or pharmacist about adding supplements like cranberry to your diet. Drink lots of water and remember to urinate right after any form of genital sex play, regardless of your age. Keep your orgasm muscles strong. Some women also report weaker orgasms, or more difficulty reaching them. Recognize that it is normal to need a little more time, and enjoy the opportunity to get more attention from your partner and yourself. Practice kegels (they'll help with stress incontinence, too) to keep the muscles in that area strong, and try masturbating regularly, if you don't already. And don't forget that lube! Many women also adore sex toys to help keep those muscles strong and provide more intense stimulation. The stores in the list on the right are all highly recommended. Be patient if it's been a while; like any form of exercise, it will take a little time to get in good shape.

It's up to you! Some research has shown that while physical changes are natural, others are completely self-made. Women who expect to experience a decrease in sexual desire are far more likely to find that they do; in fact, they may be the only women who do! You create your own reality here, so remember that you have the potential to be interested and able at any age when it comes to sex. If physical, relational or personal factors are bringing you down, help is available. Otherwise, it's time to make some stories that will scare the grandkids!

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