



FACT SHEET

Sex and Aging 101

Contact

(416) 513-0440

www.realizecanada.org

info@realizecanada.org

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POSITIVE CHANGE
FOR PEOPLE LIVING
WITH HIV AND OTHER
EPISODIC DISABILITIES



INTRODUCTION

Sex and Aging 101

Many older adults ages 50-plus enjoy fulfilling sex lives or would like to. However, you may find limited information about how to have a healthy sex life or feel uncomfortable getting help. While aging can bring changes to your sexuality, learning more can empower you to live as you like.





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Do most people stay interested in sex as they age?

Yes. While everyone is different, a majority of older adults remain interested in sex. Their exact interests may change and adapt due to limitations caused by aging or simply changes in preferences and partners. Research even found that being optimistic about sex as you age is associated with actually enjoying sex more over the years.^{1,2}

^{1,2}. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

So, why is sex among older adults sometimes taboo?

There can be a lot of shame associated with sex as people age. This may make people feel they cannot talk about it or should not have a sex life. It may also make it harder to talk with a doctor. But this should not stop you from exploring and enjoying sex if you choose.³

3. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

How does aging affect sexual ability?

Aging can cause physical changes to the vagina that make it less comfortable to be penetrated. It can also reduce natural lubrication of the vagina, but using an artificial lubricant can help replace this. It can also become difficult for a penis to stay hard, but options including medication can help with this.^{4,5,6}

4,5,6. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

How can menopause impact sex?

Menopause can cause sexual desire to increase or decrease, depending on the individual. Some people in menopause use hormones to treat symptoms like hot flashes, and these hormones can increase sexual desire.⁷

7. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

How do other health conditions relate to sex and aging?

Physical health issues like arthritis and chronic pain can make sex uncomfortable. Conditions like diabetes and heart disease can make it difficult for some people to have an erection. Dementia and related conditions can also impact sex, including someone's ability to truly consent to having sex. Mental health can affect your desire for sex. Finally, prescriptions of different types can also have sexual health side effects.^{8,9}

8,9. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

How can I keep enjoying sex in spite of changes?

In addition to the tips above, like trying lubricant or using medications for erectile dysfunction, many adults change their sexual practices as they age. This may include more of a focus on intimacy like cuddling and kissing and less on penetrative sex. Playing around with how you engage in sex can lead to new interests and discoveries. Allow yourself more time for sexual activity and make sure your space works for how you need to move. Also, keeping a healthy lifestyle (like eating well, exercising, and avoiding smoking and drinking) can also help.^{10,11,12}

^{10,11,12}. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

What if I don't have a partner with whom to enjoy sex?

Some people find that as they age, they may not find an emotionally intimate and sexual relationship in the same person. They may also lose a partner or otherwise find themselves seeking new relationships that align to their needs. Many older adults also find “solo sex” (or masturbation) as an enjoyable way to meet their needs.¹³

13. <https://www.realizecanada.org/wp-content/uploads/SHOP-Reference-List.pdf>

How can I explore sex safely?

Remember that while your specific sexual health needs may change as you age, sexually transmitted infections are on the rise among older adults. There are also many other health issues to take into consideration. Be sure to practice safer sex and consult with a medical professional whom you trust.

**To learn more about
sex and aging, and
to explore other
resources, visit:**

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