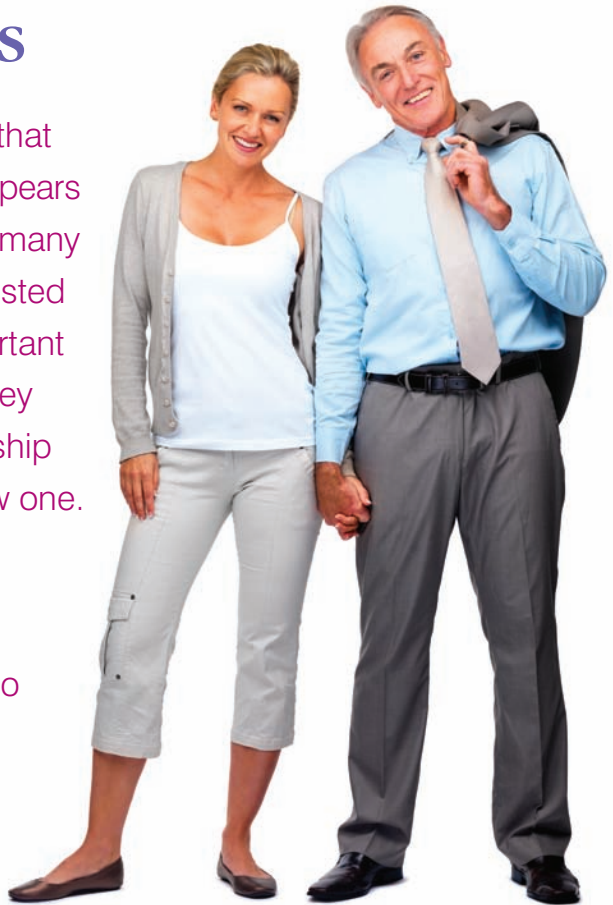


Loving & Sex for Older Adults



There is a common belief that your sex drive simply disappears as you get older. In reality many older people remain interested in sex. It can play an important role in their life, whether they are in a long term relationship or are embarking on a new one.

A healthy sex life is more than the physical activity, sex can also help people to feel wanted, trusted, treasured and alive.



Changes to your body

Women

Many women find that their feelings about sex change during or after the menopause. For some the relief of no longer having to worry about getting pregnant can lead to more relaxed feelings about sex.

Others may feel that their fertility made them sexual or attractive in the first place, and therefore they can lose confidence when that has gone.

Changes in hormone levels that come with the menopause can increase a woman's sex drive but other physical changes, including changes to the vagina, mean there is less lubrication which can make sex more painful.

Taking things more slowly to allow your body time to produce more natural lubricants can help, as can using a water-based lubricant which is available from the chemist. You can make applying the lubricant part of the fun building up to full penetration.





Men

As men get older it can take longer to get an erection and it may not be as firm as it used to be. A firm erection depends on a good blood supply to the penis and men with conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, hardened arteries and diabetes are more likely to experience problems. Erection problems can act as an early warning system for these conditions. You should talk to your GP if you have recognised a consistent change.

Drinking too much alcohol can make it more difficult to have or keep an erection and regularly drinking over the recommended limits can reduce the production of the hormone Testosterone, which will affect your sex drive. Smoking increases the risk of having smaller and softer erections.

Some medicines can also cause erectile dysfunction; these include treatments for arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure and depression. There are a range of highly successful treatments for erection difficulties available.

These include:

- Tablets such as Viagra
- Gels and injections applied directly to the penis
- Vacuum pumps
- Penile rods or tubes
- Surgical implants
- Counselling

Don't be put off if your initial choice of treatment is not satisfactory. Your GP will help find the best remedy for you and is also well placed to advise on erectile dysfunction tablets, and to prescribe them safely.

Better sex in later life



Here are some tips for maintaining a happy sex life:

- Change positions if you or your partner find it painful
- Try using a water-based lubricant to aid penetration
- Try sex in the morning, when you are more relaxed
- Experiment with each other using touch and massage
- Take painkillers, if prescribed them, before starting to have sex
- Be spontaneous – don't only stick to set times and days for sex
- Make sure you have enough time without interruptions
- Find out the possible side-effects of any medication you are taking and discuss these with your doctor – particularly if they are likely to affect your sex drive
- Don't always judge good sex on having an orgasm
- Avoid too much alcohol before having sex
- Try not to have sex after a heavy meal
- Don't assume that a lower sex drive is down to age and being "past it" – it may be linked to medication
- Don't assume penetration is the only real way to sexual fulfilment
- Don't be anxious about seeking help



Safe dating and safe sex

Many people over 50 are now dating or starting new relationships. If you are meeting someone you don't know it is important to follow some basic safety rules, and if you are starting out on a new sexual relationship it is important to think about your sexual health. Safe sex not only avoids unwanted pregnancies, it also protects against sexually transmitted infections. These can affect anyone whatever their age and they are on the increase among older age groups.

Safe dating

These days there are many different ways of meeting new partners; personal ads in magazines, websites, dating agencies which cater for anyone whether heterosexual, lesbian or gay men or those with a disability. Many people may seek partners for companionship as much as for a sexual relationship. However meeting new people for the first time carries risks and you need to ensure that you are safe.

Here are some tips from the Suzy Lamplugh Trust:

- When replying to a lonely hearts advert never give personal details such as your address or surname. It is not unknown for address details to be obtained by having just a telephone number, so be guarded about giving this out.
- Always arrange to meet in a busy public place, preferably in the daytime, until you are sure of the other person's identity and feel comfortable about them.
- Try and take a friend along, at least at the beginning to meet your date. Work out a prearranged signal with your friend to indicate whether you would prefer your friend to stay with you.
- Tell someone where you are going, who with (including name, phone number and address) and when you will be back.
- Ideally don't go home with your date and don't invite them back to your home or accept a lift from them.
- Plan in advance how you are going to get home.
- Carry a personal alarm and know how to use it. This will shock and disorientate an assailant so you will be able to get away.
- Pay attention to your instincts. If you feel uneasy about someone, there may be a reason. Don't tell yourself that you're being silly, be careful not to give them personal details about yourself and do not arrange a second date.

Safe sex

Most sexual activity with a partner carries some risk. The best protection is to use a condom (male or female) throughout the act of intercourse. Nowadays it is easy to get condoms. They are available to purchase from many chemists, pubs and other public places. You can also get a free supply from a sexual health clinic.

The most common reason for forgetting to practise safe sex is drinking too much. If this is likely to be you, plan ahead.

Signs of sexually transmitted diseases

A sexually transmitted infection (STI) is an infection that is usually spread through sexual contact. Sometimes you may contract the disease but show no symptoms. Therefore if you do have regular unprotected sex with different partners it is important to have a check up and you may also be advised to have a hepatitis B injection. Most STIs can be completely cured if diagnosed and treated early enough, but they can become

painful, uncomfortable and may cause permanent damage to your health if they are missed or ignored.

Signs of sexually transmitted infections include:

- Pain when passing urine
- Abnormal discharge
- Infectious sores and blisters in the genital area
- Warts on or around the penis, anus or vagina
- Itchiness
- A rash





*Lesbian,
Gay,
Bisexual or
Transgender?*

There are lots of assumptions made about older people, including that they are all heterosexual. This is obviously not true. You may have always been open about your sexuality, you may have always kept it to yourself or you may now be recognising sexual feelings that you have not allowed to emerge in the past.

There may be local groups you can join, contact Hastings and Rother Gay Helpline, Age Concern Eastbourne or the Lesbian, Gay, Bi-sexual and Transgender Switchboard. The Terrence Higgins Trust also offers support both locally and nationally.

Where to get help

To find or change a GP ring

Primary Care Support Services 01903 756800

If you have any concerns about a sexually transmitted infection either talk to your GP or visit an **NHS Sexual Health Clinic**. Information and tests are free and confidential. To find your nearest clinic telephone one of the following numbers:

Eastbourne 01323 416100

Hastings 01424 464750

Lewes 01273 664721

NHS Direct on 0845 4647

website: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk

If you are worried about erectile dysfunction talk to your GP who might refer you to the **Urology and Acute Continence Service**

01424 755255 ext 6381

Other sources of information include:

British Association for Sexual and Relationship Therapy

020 8543 2707, www.basrt.org.uk

www.40over40.com

www.lovelifematters.co.uk

For information on healthy ageing, including sexual health:

www.ageuk.org.uk

www.bbc.co.uk/health

www.nhs.uk

www.saga.co.uk/health

For information on condom use:

www.durex.com

For lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender older people, contact:

Terrence Higgins Trust on 01323 649927 www.tht.org.uk

Hastings and Rother Gay Helpline 01424 444777

Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Switchboard 01273 204050

**Age Concern Eastbourne Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender
Social Group 01323 638474 ext 25**

This leaflet can be made available in other
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