

Sex and Growing Older – Advice for Men



Getting older can affect your sexual life, but you can have a satisfying sex-life in your nineties!

Don't despair if you think you have a problem.

Get Help!

Don't worry about talking to your doctor or nurse about your sex life – they want to help and they understand that it is important to you – it's natural.

Talk to your doctor if your sex life changes may be after developing a new medical condition or starting some new tablets. Talking about a problem is the first step to solving it.

This booklet is for couples and men who want to find out more about sexual problems so that they can continue to enjoy or indeed return to an intimate and fulfilling sex life.

Society often stereotypes older people, viewing them as too old to have sex or be interested in it.

It is a myth, that older women did not, and older men could not, have sex and were not interested in it. However, many research studies have shown this is quite untrue. It is now realised that wanting to be sexually active one way or another continues well into old age for a high proportion of both men and women, and that they see this as enhancing their quality of life. Nevertheless, the idea of older women and men having sex has been almost a taboo subject until recent times.

The Good News

Being sexually active does not mean to say that penetrative sex has to occur every time. It means that some form of satisfying sexual activity is possible – and indulged in. Getting older does not mean that a fall in desire or problems with sex are inevitable.

However, as couples grow older they may have different attitudes towards sex and this is influenced by their culture, religion, social norms and certain myths, as well as their physical health. It is therefore important to understand what effect ageing has on sex.

More About Sex and Ageing

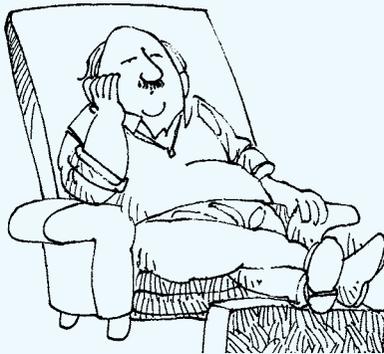
The capacity for sexual feelings involves many different parts of our lives - biological, physical, psychological and social. We are born with an inner sexual drive in order for the human race to continue and it is influenced by physical things like hormones, illness and medications, as well as the influences of mood and relationships, self-esteem, body image, and social expectations, such as what is considered appropriate sexual behaviour.

The key to enjoying a fulfilling sexual relationship as we grow older is understanding ourselves and our partners, the changing needs that we might experience and accepting each other's individuality.

Independent of age, enjoying satisfying sex is not purely about penetrative intercourse. It is about having an open mind about what sex is, thinking and feeling sexy, as well as allowing yourself to behave in a sexual way (cuddles, kisses, talks about sex and so on). Although sexual desire can decrease or diminish over the years, a lot of older couples continue being sexual with each other, and many also continue to masturbate, either alone or each other.

Your partner is probably ageing too and your partner's attitudes to your sexual relationship may have changed. Either of you may find that at some time you lose confidence and perhaps become unsure about how you would define a satisfying sexual life. It can be affected by various illnesses and infirmities which we encounter as we grow older. People sometimes have to try to come to terms with themselves or their partner becoming terminally ill. However, under such difficult circumstances many feel it is comforting to maintain or even re-engage physical closeness.

However, ageing itself does have an effect on a person's sexual capability.



How are Men Affected Directly?

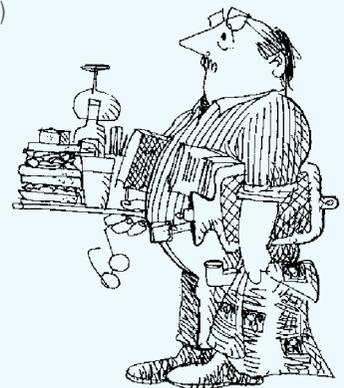
There is no reason why not you should not continue to have sex way into your seventies and eighties, although desire is not so compelling or urgent, and the ability to get and sustain an erection is more difficult compared with a younger man.

A man's sexual experiences vary throughout his life and age plays an important role in how these experiences are perceived. Physical activity decreases with increasing age and this can have an impact on performance in every aspect of life.

Some of the obvious changes which can be associated with sexual function in men as they age are:

- **Impotence**, otherwise known as erectile dysfunction (ED), which is failure to get or maintain an erection adequate for any sexual activity. There are many causes for this, as well as ageing. The first time it happens, it can be the most humiliating thing a man has ever experienced. He is usually acutely embarrassed and often will not talk about it even to his partner, leading to great misunderstanding between them. Erection problems can be a major cause of broken relationships (~25%). Treatments for erectile dysfunction include self help, tablets (PDE5 inhibitors – Viagra, Cialis or Levitra) psychosexual therapy and Kegel's exercises to strengthen pelvic muscles
- **A fall in desire** and also decreased interest in sexual activity, with lack of spontaneous sexual thoughts, compared with when he was younger
- **Spontaneous or psychogenic erections**, which are very prevalent and often troublesome as a young man, are much fewer or absent with increasing age
- **Erections are not as firm** as when he was younger either, and may be bendable or soft (especially the glans), so that penetration becomes more difficult. To be able to penetrate more easily and without pain for his partner, a good lubricant is essential for both partners, or a hormone cream if the woman has a dry vagina.

- **Direct stimulation** to the penis may be needed (sometimes repeatedly) to keep an erection, and there are fewer contractions at the time of orgasm
- **A fall-off** in the number of nocturnal or early morning erections. Whereas a teenager can have an average of 4 erections while he is asleep at night lasting an hour or more, this can fall to only two erections in a man over 60, who will often wake without the usual early morning erection he has been used to all his life
- **The volume of semen ejaculated** is very much less or sometimes there is none, This is partly because the testicles have got smaller and softer. Some men can get quite upset about this
- **After reaching a climax**, there is a period of 'rest' when a man has to recuperate before he gets another erection. In a young man, this time can be very short or absent but in the older man, the period to recovery can go from minutes to hours to days, as he gets older.
- **Less acute pleasure** in getting to the peak of orgasm and ejaculation
- **Retrograde ejaculation** (where semen passes back into the bladder rather than along its usual route down the urethra) can occur, especially after a prostate operation or with some medications
- **Premature ejaculation** - when a man ejaculates sooner than he or his partner would like (although more usually, this is often described when an older man feels he has to hurry because his erection is going soft and he has to come to a climax quickly)





→ I LIKED YOU BETTER, WHEN THAT BULGE
WAS IN YOUR TROUSERS "-

What Else Can Affect a Man's Sex Life as he Grows Older?

Prostate problems

An operation for an enlarged prostate, whether benign or cancer, can cause erectile dysfunction (ED), but this is less likely if the surgeon can do a so-called nerve sparing operation. Chemo and radiotherapy are also common causes of ED because of scarring (fibrosis). Ejaculatory problems such as painful or retrograde (backwards into the bladder) ejaculation can also occur.

Testosterone

The male sex hormone (testosterone) level falls naturally by 1-2% every year in ageing men, with a man of 60 having two-thirds of the testosterone level of a 20 year old, yet managing perfectly satisfactorily at that level. However, a more rapid fall, at any age, occurring for a variety of reasons, can cause a set of symptoms which may be very nebulous and difficult to categorise. They include loss of drive, general tiredness and loss of interest in sex. This syndrome is called the testosterone deficiency syndrome (TDS). Because the symptoms are so vague, a diagnosis of TDS should not be made unless it has been confirmed by blood tests. The testosterone level can now be restored to a good functioning level by a long acting injection, a testosterone gel rubbed daily into the skin, or less frequently, daily patches or a pellet stuck every day to the gum..

The only contraindication is for those with prostate cancer, breast cancer, increased red blood cells, thick blood and uncontrolled heart failure.

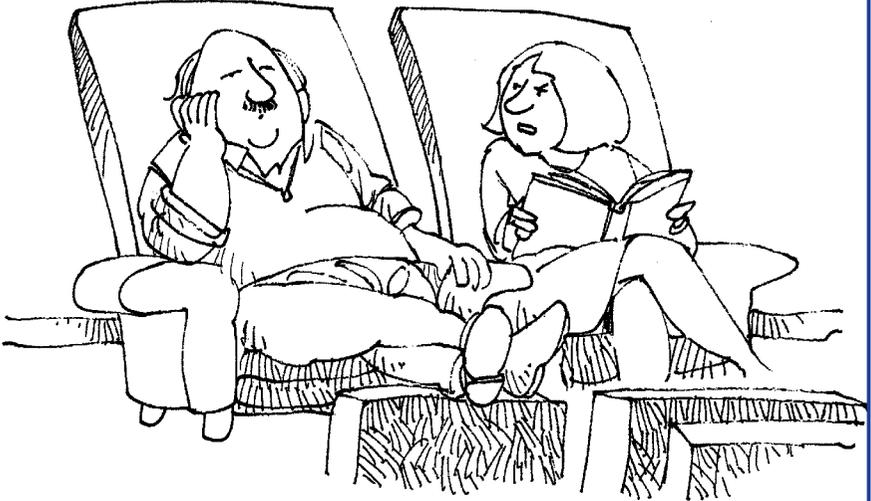
Mental health problems

Men who have mental health problems may also experience sexual difficulties either because of the illness, or more commonly, due to the side effects of their treatment. Anti-psychotics can cause erectile dysfunction, while antidepressants, including those prescribed to help premature ejaculation, can result in delayed ejaculation as well as a lack of desire and inability to get and maintain a hard erection. Depression is the most common diagnosis in ageing men who can also experience problems like low desire as well as erectile dysfunction. It's often the case that if the erection problems are treated, the depressive symptoms may also resolve, and vice versa.

Some physical conditions can cause great difficulty in a couple having sex together and sometimes a lot of ingenuity is required. Using microwavable heated pads around sore joints and careful timing of pain killers may help in arthritis or any condition where there is chronic pain.

Cardiovascular problems such as high blood pressure, poor circulation and having had a stroke can put you off having sex together and fear of a heart attack in particular, may make you both nervous about it.

Hypertension (high blood pressure) is a very common condition as we all age. It can have a significant effect on a person's health and sexual performance unless it is controlled with treatment. Many drugs to reduce the blood pressure can cause loss of desire and impotence in a man. If you tell the prescribing doctor, a more appropriate tablet can be given.



— "WAKE UP! IT'S TIME TO GO TO BED...."—

Neurological problems

Any illness affecting the nervous system can affect sexual activity in all ages. There are many neurological conditions that can influence sexual health but the common presentations in ageing men are stroke, Parkinson's disease, injury to the spine, dementia, prolapsed disc and so on. Often there is a decrease in sexual desire due to changes in the brain and spinal tract damage can reduce the ability for sexual arousal, erection and ejaculation.

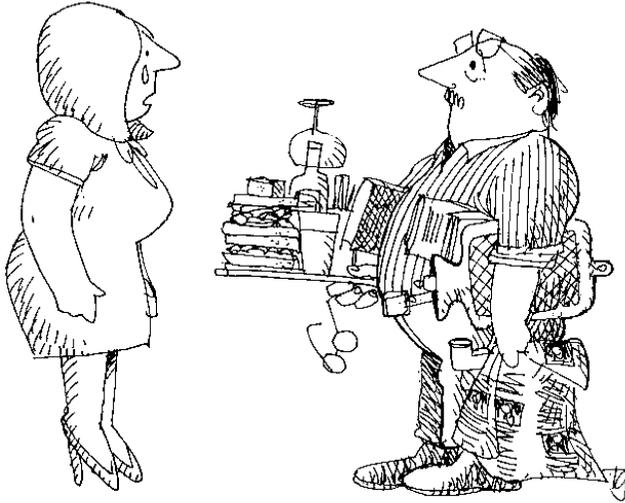
As men get older, a satisfying sex life becomes less aimed at getting an orgasm and more associated with intimacy and affection. Other factors that have an influence on sexual ability can include things like the age of a partner, whether either has been widowed or divorced before, and the couple's prior knowledge of, and experience of, sex. Your partner's ideas and attitudes towards continuing with sex is of course, a major factor in whether a couple can manage or not.

Problems such as decreased mobility, personality changes and incontinence can cause further problems in the ability to engage in sexual activity. For more information on the problems mentioned above, contact us for factsheets from our website

Diabetes

Diabetes often has a major impact on a man. A raised blood sugar will cause erection problems in around 50% of older men, usually in overweight people with so-called type 2 diabetes, smokers, and poorly controlled blood sugar levels. This problem can usually be controlled with a strict diet and weight loss.

Pelvic infection or damage to the pelvis including the bladder after an accident or an operation on the prostate can cause erectile problems later in life. Men with renal failure can also experience low sexual desire.



- I REMEMBER WHEN, THE ONLY THING YOU
WANTED TO TAKE TO BED, WAS ME! "-

Raised cholesterol level

This causes furring up of the blood vessels. In a man, the smallest ones to be affected are those in the penis, resulting in a poor blood flow and consequent difficulty in getting a decent erection. Erection problems can be an important warning sign that the coronary vessels, which are much larger than the penile ones, may well be getting furred up in the next 3-5 years, leading to angina and a probable heart attack. Conversely, 44-65% of older men suffering from a cardiovascular disease also experience erectile dysfunction (ED).

**For further information
please contact**



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Other sources of information

- **Alzheimer's Society** <http://alzheimers.org.uk/>
- **College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists (CORST)**
<http://www.cosrt.org.uk/>
- **Men's Health Forum** <http://www.menshealthforum.org.uk>
- **Relate** www.relate.org.uk
- **Stroke Association** <http://www.stroke.org.uk/>

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