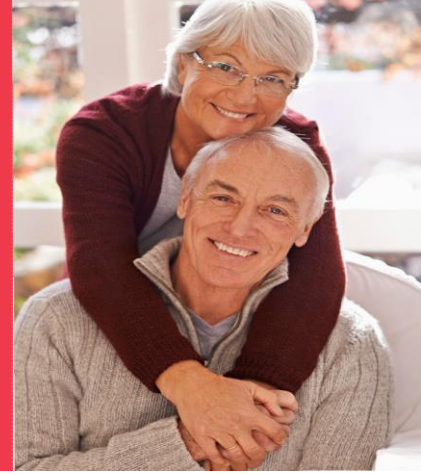


Sex and Intimacy After Stroke

Many people have questions about sexuality and intimacy after stroke but are too shy to ask. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.



IS IT SAFE TO HAVE SEX WITH MY PARTNER AFTER A STROKE

Yes. The only exceptions are if your blood pressure is out of control, if you very recently had a heart attack, or if you have been specifically told by your doctor that it isn't safe.

MY SEX LIFE AND INTIMACY WITH MY PARTNER ISN'T THE SAME AFTER MY STROKE. WHY?

The stroke itself – A stroke can cause physical problems such as weakness or decreased sensation on one side of the body. These problems interfere with sexual activities. The stroke itself can also directly impact the brain's ability for sexual desire and arousal.

Our advice: Your occupational therapist may be able to offer you information on how to overcome physical barriers to sexual activity such as different positions and aides. Don't be shy to ask them – it is part of their job.

Fatigue – Fatigue is a common side-effect of stroke. It can take more energy to do things after stroke. If you are tired from therapy or just walking to the bathroom, then you won't have as much energy for intimacy.

Our advice: Try to pick times of the day when you are most energetic. Over time, your energy level should improve as you recover from your stroke. If your energy level does not improve, you should talk to your family doctor about your sleep, mood and other possible reasons for your continued fatigue.

Mood – Depression affects many people after stroke, including your desire to be intimate.

Our advice: Feeling sad or down after your stroke is a serious issue and can slow down your recovery. Talk to your family doctor if you are feeling this way.

Medications – Certain medications that help prevent another stroke can affect your sexual activities.

Our advice: If you are concerned that your medication is affecting your sexual activity, speak to your doctor. Never stop taking any medications without speaking to your doctor.

Self-image and the relationship – Sometimes following a stroke, people feel less attractive to their partners, or that their romantic relationship has changed into a caregiver/patient role.

Our advice: You should communicate openly about these concerns to your partner.

Communication – Stroke can affect how we talk and how well we communicate. Good communication in a relationship is very important.

Our advice: Find a time when both you and your partner are comfortable. Take time to talk to your partner about your needs. Give them a chance to respond and listen openly to what they have to say. Your speech language pathologist can help with communication challenges.

Bladder control – Some people have to use a catheter to control their bladder. Other people have difficulty with urine leaking.

Our advice: For males using a catheter, the catheter can be covered with a lubricated condom. For females, the catheter can be taped to leg to avoid tugging. If urine leaking is a problem, try to avoid positions that put pressure on the bladder, and avoid drinking large amounts of water before planned sexual activities.

Pain – Stroke can cause shoulder pain, or electric, tingling pain on one side of the body. Pain can impact your sexual activities.

Our advice: Talk to your doctor and therapists about medications, exercises and therapy options to treat your pain.

WHAT CAN I DO TO IMPROVE THE INTIMACY THAT I HAVE WITH MY PARTNER AFTER THE STROKE?

We have the following general tips:

- Start with reintroducing other intimate activities like kissing and hugging first;
- Plan ahead times for sexual activities when both partners are relaxed and well-rested;
- Plan for enough time to “get in the mood” and make a romantic atmosphere;
- Communication is key;
- Most of all, remember - sex and intimacy are not performances. There are no successes and failures.

WHERE CAN I FIND MORE HELP?

Some couples may require additional help from a sex therapist. A certified sex therapist near you can be found at the Board of Examiners in Sex Therapy and Counseling Ontario's website: <http://www.bestco.info/>



Unfortunately, sex therapy is not a service covered by the Ontario Health Insurance Plan.