

Intimacy and post-polio

Dealing with the symptoms of post-polio syndrome may seem overwhelming to most. With many different issues that polio survivors face, sexuality and intimacy with your partner may not seem like the first item to tackle. However, polio survivors and their partners have sexual needs just like everyone else that important to address.

Sexual intimacy can:

- strengthen self-esteem
- create intimacy with your partner, while acting as an important source of pleasure, and relaxation.
- Has been shown to boost the immune system
- relieve stress
- burn calories
- even reduce pain in some circumstances.



Straight Talk about post-polio and sex

Symptoms of post polio syndrome do not directly cause impotency or sexual dysfunction. However, post polio syndrome does affect energy levels – energy plays an important part of sexual acts.

As with any other physical activity, polio survivors must approach sexual acts with a sense of balancing energy expenditure and pacing their lifestyle to match their sexual priorities. To put this idea into context, the amount of physical effort required for a person to achieve an orgasm is equivalent to climbing a set of stairs. Just as balancing how often a polio survivor decides to walk up stairs, so to must they create a sense of equilibrium with acts of intimacy throughout their daily lives.



Readjustment and Planning for Success

Couples can benefit from having open discussions about their desires and how to achieve them. Along with open communication with your partner, here are some guidelines to consider:



- Remember that it takes time to rediscover what works best for you as a couple
- Expect a certain amount of frustration and, as much as possible, maintain good humor and don't take setbacks too seriously
- Break away from typical stereotypes – just because someone is aging, doesn't mean that they don't enjoy sex.
- Look after their personal hygiene and appearance.
- Different degrees of muscle weakness may require adjustments in seeking a comfortable position for sex. It may be further complicated by muscle stiffness, bowel or bladder incontinence, fatigue, vision problems, and lack of balance.
- Keep an open mind - there are many ways to enjoy sex besides intercourse! The tenderness and warmth conveyed in cuddling and touching can be a continuing source of physical satisfaction and fulfillment.
- Your doctor can help by providing information, clearly discussing sexual function, arranging for sexual counseling if necessary, or by prescribing medications.

To learn more about this topic, check out these great resources:

- **The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability: for All of Us Who Live with Disabilities, Chronic Pain and Illness.** Miriam Kaufman, Cory Silverberg and Fran Odette.
- **Enabling Romance: a Guide to Love, Sex and Relationships for the Disabled.** Ken Kroll & Erica Levy Klein
- **'Post Polio: A Guide for polio survivors and their families.** Ch.25, Dr. Julie Silver, M.D.