

Have A Chronic Medical Condition? You Can Still Enjoy Great Sex

By Michael Castleman

The bad news: You've just been diagnosed with diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, or some other chronic condition. Your doctor says it "can't be cured," but it can be "managed," which you'll need to do "for the rest of your life." The doctor asks, "Do you have any questions?" You ask several—all except: "What about my love life?" Every chronic condition is different. But the best approaches to sexual coping are pretty much the same.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way

Faced with a chronic condition, some people think: Sex is over for me. In studies of people who have withdrawn from sex, the two biggest reasons are (1) no partner, and (2) a chronic medical condition.

You're free to retire from partner lovemaking if you want. But even if you can no longer have vaginal intercourse, there are still many ways to enjoy physical intimacy and fulfilling lovemaking. Fundamentally, satisfying sex involves playful whole-body massage that includes the genitals. Even those with severe disabilities can often kiss, cuddle, receive massage, and perhaps give it. If you want to be sexual, you can be, either solo or with a lover. You just have to figure out what you can do to enjoy sensual pleasure. Focus on your abilities, not your disabilities.

Flexibility Is Key

Studies of people with chronic conditions and disabilities agree that the single most important element in remaining sexually active is flexibility. If you define "sex" as only vaginal intercourse, and can no longer do that, you're justified in concluding: Sex is over for me. But if you're flexible, if you define sex more broadly, then bidding farewell to vaginal intercourse becomes more like passing up one dish at a huge buffet. Can you kiss and cuddle? Can you give and receive whole-body massage? Can you provide or receive oral sex? Can you use sex toys? The more

flexible you are about sexuality, the more likely you are to continue to enjoy sexual fulfillment.

Find Information and Support

Start by asking your doctor about the sexual effects of any and all medications prescribed for your condition. Then ask your pharmacist. Then search the Internet: sexual effects of—then the names of your medications. You may get different answers. But you'll come away with a useful overview.

Over time, continue to discuss the sexual implications of your condition or medications with your doctor. At first, you may feel awkward or embarrassed. Remember: Sex is a normal, natural part of life. You have every right to enjoy lovemaking within your physical abilities—and health professionals can and should help you identify the types of sexual enjoyment that are available to you.

Join the organization(s) devoted to your condition. It's a very rare chronic condition that doesn't have a national organization. To find the organization(s), search the Internet. Once you find the organization(s) focused on your condition, ask for a referral to an expert on its sexual implications. Chances are that someone in the organization has good information for you.

Join a support group. Most organizations that focus on chronic medical conditions also sponsor support groups. Support groups are a wonderful tool for coping with all aspects of chronic conditions, including sex. They take a situation that's usually isolating—and turn it into the sole criterion for membership. There's nothing quite like talking with people who know *exactly* what you're going through.

Work to Stay As Healthy As Possible

“How can I be healthy?” you ask, “I have this damn chronic condition.” Yes, you do. But chances are you'll feel better, have an easier time managing your condition, and retain more sexual interest and ability if your lifestyle is as healthy as possible:

- Don't smoke.
- Don't drink more than two alcoholic drinks per day.
- Eat at least five servings of fruits and vegetables a day.
- Within your abilities, strive for regular moderate exercise, ideally, at least 30 minutes a day.

- Get at least seven hours of sleep a night.

Look For New Opportunities

As the reality of having a chronic condition sinks in, people grieve the loss of their previous life and the things they can no longer enjoy as they once did, among them, the ways they used to make love. This is normal. But if you stop there, you wind up depressed—and depression kills libido and erotic enjoyment.

Every passage in life closes some doors and opens others. Which doors have opened for you? If you answer “none,” you’re still grieving the loss of your pre-diagnosis life. Let some time pass, then reconsider new opportunities. Eventually, most people embrace their new opportunities for fun and personal growth—including new approaches to making love.

Experiment with Sex Toys

If your condition causes a decrease in genital sensitivity, lubricants can help. In addition, a vibrator might help women and a vibrating penis sleeve might help men. Depending on your situation, other sex toys might also enhance your lovemaking. Try the sex toy company affiliate with this site, mypleasure.com.

Consider Sex Therapy

Many Americans have chronic medical conditions: arthritis, 32 million; high blood pressure, 22 million; allergies, 20 million.; diabetes, 16 million; heart disease, 14 million; asthma, more than 5 million. You’re not alone. The prevalence of chronic conditions means that help abounds: specialists, resources, books, and counseling.

A sex therapist can help you and your lover adjust to your condition yet still enjoy fulfilling lovemaking. The process typically takes a few months of weekly consultations. To find a sex therapist near you, visit aasect.org, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, or sstarnet.org, the Society for Sex Therapy and Research.

Reference:

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