

Not So Old-Fashioned

Why it's important to have a healthy and safe sex life as we age BY ANNE SCHUHLE

It's safe to say we all dread the thought of accidentally walking in on our parents or grandparents when they're getting intimate. But now that you're old enough to have kids who have kids, you should know intimacy can be part of a healthy lifestyle at any age.

"Our culture would have us believe sexual desire is eliminated after we reach 60," says St. Louis sex therapist Linda Weiner. "It's so not true. It's a natural function. We are physical beings who need to be touched."

By some physicians' estimates, only 35% of women and 70% of men remain sexually active after age 70. These numbers are so far apart from each other, Weiner says, because there has been a cultural shaming of women who retain interest in sex. On the guy's side, many of them confuse intimacy with performance. They may opt out of sex because their bodies don't function how they used to. Both genders should see sex as more than recreational, Weiner says.

"Sexual intimacy is tremendously important. Physical contact helps us avoid early death, depression and illness," she says.

Overall, Weiner says she sees a growing acceptance that lovemaking is not just for the young and beautiful. The folks who gave us the "free love era" are now in their 60s and 70s, and have always identified themselves as more sexual, she says. They don't consider it shameful.

AARP reports sex can even boost your immune system, burn calories, help you relax, and lower your blood pressure. But you shouldn't fret if intercourse has lost its appeal, grown painful, and seems impossible. Physical needs can be satisfied in a variety of ways.

"There are more ways to make love than the old-fashioned ... way," Weiner says. "It doesn't have to be intercourse. Steak is good, but appetizers are also delicious. As we age, we can eat an appetizer and still feel satisfied. The same is true sexually."

Get out of your usual rut. Do some dating, dancing and flirting.

Don't give up too soon. Guys, you may need more—and more direct—stimulation for orgasm, give it time. Ladies, give it a little more attention.

Take time with foreplay. Use alternative ways to stimulate each other.

Work with what you've got. Even if you've had prostate cancer or surgery, you can have an orgasm without an erection. Had a hysterectomy? Don't rule out an orgasm.

It's a whole-body experience. A woman can focus on muscle groups other than the uterus to bring about release.



PROTECTION: IMPORTANT AT ANY AGE

Whatever you do, think about your sexual safety. Sex therapist Linda Weiner says sexually transmitted diseases are increasingly common among the 60-plus crowd because senior sex is still not widely acknowledged. This results in a lack of education, and a lack of protection.

Because women tend to live longer than men, the availability of male sex partners is limited, especially if you live in a senior care facility. This means one man could be intimate with numerous women. He could have an STD, so watch out.

FAST FACT

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SEX THERAPIST LINDA WEINER