

# Sexuality After a Stroke

## Encouragement, Support & Advice for Stroke Survivors

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Discussing sexuality after stroke may be uncomfortable for some people. Many stroke survivors wonder if sex is still safe. They are concerned having sex will cause another stroke and their partners worry about hurting their loved one who had the stroke. In most cases, as long as you are medically stable, it is safe to resume sexual relations with your partner. Of course, it is recommended that you talk with your doctor if you are concerned.

### **Like many stroke survivors, you may have questions:**

#### **Will I have another stroke during sex?**

The amount of energy needed for sex is similar to walking up a flight of stairs, so it is unlikely to cause another stroke. Communicate with your partner about any concerns that you may have. Consider talking to a counselor if needed.

#### **Will I have trouble communicating with my partner?**

Patients with aphasia (loss of speech) will need to find alternative ways to communicate their sexual needs. Touching and gesturing may be sufficient to communicate your needs.

#### **How does stroke affect relationships?**

The location in the brain where your stroke occurred may impact your desire to have sex (libido), your arousal, and your level of self-consciousness around sex. It is also common for stroke survivors to suffer from depression. When you are depressed, you may have less interest in sexual intimacy.

### **Here are a few tips that may help you improve sexual relations after stroke:**

**Communicate your feelings openly and honestly.** Being open and honest with your partner will help to establish or continue good communication.

**Enjoy fun leisure activities together.** Hugging, laughing, and having fun helps to build intimacy and to maintain your relationship. Rediscover what you enjoy together!

**Rest up and plan ahead for sex.** Timing is important. Sexual activity will be more enjoyable when you are well rested and have uninterrupted time together. Allowing extra time is important too, as stroke survivors may require extra time to change positions or find a comfortable position.

**Begin Slowly.** Touching, massaging, and cuddling are ways to begin to regain intimacy. After a stroke, sense of touch may be affected, so it is important to explore touch with your partner, and what feels good.

**Find a comfortable position.** Paralysis or weakness on one side of your body may require you to change the position you normally use for sex. Using pillows or props to protect the weaker side of your body is sometimes helpful. It may be helpful to explore side-lying positions.

**Talk with your doctor about how your medications may affect sex.** Some medications may make you tired, some may make it difficult for men to achieve an erection or orgasm, and some may change your sexual desire.

**Talk to your doctor about birth control.** If you are a woman of childbearing age, you should talk with your doctor about family planning and appropriate forms of birth control.

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CVC #1053

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