

## **Sex and Disability – Managing Physical Changes**

Following a disability there are a number of physical changes that can make it more difficult for you or your partner to enjoy sex. Learning what to do to manage your physical problems is an important part of enhancing your sexual life. Here are some things you can keep in mind when planning sexual activity.

### **Planning for Sex**

There is a myth that good sex is spontaneous. In fact, sexual activity usually involves preparation of some kind – from choosing to wear certain clothing to taking birth control precautions in advance. For people with disabilities, planning involves a few extra considerations.

For example, your preparation may include thinking about the timing of sex and about what to do with your catheter. Sexual feelings can still be spontaneous but the mechanics may take a little more time.

Preparation prior to sexual activity is suggested but it should not necessarily distract from feelings of desire, love and affection. Some couples choose to share preparation activities and incorporate them into their lovemaking while others prefer to do them separately.

### **Fatigue**

- Limit physical activity before sexual activities.
- A general exercise program will help to increase endurance and strength.
- Engage in sex at different times of the day to help you discover when your energy levels are highest.
- Plan sexual activity for times when you feel the most rested, for example, the morning is a good time for many people.

### **Pain**

- Find out if there are better pain management strategies, such as massage, stretching or another pain medication, that will work for you without sedating you too much to enjoy sex.
- Plan sexual activities at times of the day when your pain might be less.

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## Limited Range of Motion

- A stretching program can improve range of motion. Stretching can also be incorporated into sexual activity.
- Talk to a physiotherapist for suggestions on how to improve your range of motion.
- Use pillows or rolled blankets to support you in a comfortable position.

## Spasms

- If you take medication to reduce spasms you can plan to be sexual at times when the medication is at peak effectiveness.
- To help control spasms you can do gentle stretching exercises before sexual activity. Warm showers or baths also help relax the muscles.
- Choose positions that inhibit spasms. Some people take advantage of their spasms to move more during sexual activity.
- If spasms are a problem your doctor may be able to recommend some medication options.

## Limited Independent Mobility

- If you need help with getting into bed or taking your clothes off try to incorporate this into your sexual activity.
- A third person, such as an attendant, may assist with positioning before leaving the room.
- A regular exercise program (to increase strength and mobility) may help.

## Skin Breakdown

- Try to use padding or other methods of pressure relief under the sensitive areas.
- Choose positions that cause the least amount of pressure or friction on bony prominences.
- Check frequently for irritation.

If you and your partner can plan creatively, share a sense of humour and have open communication with each other it is possible to manage any physical changes and have an enjoyable sexual life.

**Medical Disclaimer:** The above information is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always ask your physician or other qualified health professional about any matter concerning your individual health.

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**For further information:** Contact the Sexual Health Rehab Service, GF Strong Rehab Centre