

Talking about Sex with a Partner

Talking openly and honestly about sex is difficult for most people. In all intimate relationships it is important to have good communication about sex and sexuality. Being able to talk about sex is the first step to solving problems and being ready to try new things.

- Be willing to introduce the topic of sexuality with a new partner.
- Be open and honest with your partner about the changes and how you feel about them.
- Try to answer your partner's questions or help them to find out by talking with your doctor or health care team.
- Find a non-sexual time to bring up the topic of sexuality.
- Practice what you plan to say with a friend or in front of a mirror.

Remember that many relationship problems occur even without injury or disability. Difficulty communicating especially about issues like sex or money is common and may have been a concern prior to your injury. It may be that no one wants to initiate a conversation about sex in order to "protect" their partner from hurt or bad feelings.

Some good tips to help with couple communication are:

Use "I" statements. If you participate in conversation by saying "You make me feel..." or "You think..." the other person is put on the defensive and must respond to your allegation instead of just listening. If you start by saying "I feel..." or "I think..." then you are taking responsibility for your own feelings and the other person can respond from a less defensive position.

Use paraphrasing to help you understand what your partner said. Paraphrasing is simply repeating back what you heard the other person say. It is a simple technique that helps to ensure that you both heard AND understood what was said.

An example of conversation where paraphrasing is **not used**:

Paul: "I feel like you're not interested in being sexual with me anymore!"

Nancy: "Well, I feel really tired from working all day and trying to keep the house clean."

In this conversation, both people are talking to each other but neither is really feeling listened to.

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An example of a conversation where paraphrasing **is used**:

Paul: “I feel like you’re not interested in being sexual with me anymore!”

Nancy: “You feel that I’m not interested in you anymore.”

Paul: “Well, that’s not exactly true. You help me out a lot and I know you care about me. I just feel like our sex life isn’t back to where it was before my injury. I feel sad about it and I want to figure out how to get back on track.”

In this conversation there is a greater degree of understanding about what the problem is. As well, defensiveness is minimized and listening and active problem solving is more likely to occur.

Anticipating and communicating about changes to the relationship is an important first step in maintaining intimacy. Sometimes it helps to talk to a marital or relationship therapist that is skilled in facilitating these kinds of adjustments.

Learning to talk about intimacy

Sex is always a difficult topic to talk about.

Some couples may benefit from some assistance; others just need a little time to become comfortable with each other again. If you find that you need help this is not a negative reflection on your relationship. There are many details to work out, fears to overcome and emotions to come to terms with. And although at times the process may be discouraging, the effort will often pay off in the end.

Set a time together to talk about intimate concerns. You may both need to acknowledge feelings of sadness about the changes that have occurred. You may be missing the romantic times that you had prior to the injury.

As with most things in life, talking about sex with a partner gets easier the more you do it.

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