

Sex over 40 - and beyond

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How to enjoy a healthy sex life as you get older. By Jane Murphy



Think getting older means your sex life dries up and disappears? Rubbish! Around 70% of the over-50s think sex is now a more fulfilling experience than it was in their younger years, according to a recent survey by Saga. But that doesn't mean you don't need to work at it. Here's all you need to know about having fun and staying healthy between the sheets...

How your body changes

You probably don't need us to tell you that big changes start to take place in your body once you hit your 40s. During the perimenopause - the time leading up to the menopause - you may experience symptoms such as changes in the pattern of your periods, vaginal dryness, hot flushes, night sweats, mood swings and forgetfulness. NHS estimates suggest around eight in 10 women will experience some of these symptoms due to declining oestrogen levels. [Read more on the menopause.](#)

Get lubricated!

Perimenopausal symptoms can affect your sex life to varying degrees - but there *are* remedies available. Vaginal dryness, for example, may mean it takes you longer to become comfortably lubricated: foreplay is key, plus it pays to keep some lubricant handy in the bedroom. You could also try using an intimate moisturiser such as Durex Sensilube (around £5.76 from chemists nationwide).

Coping with mood swings

If mood swings are playing havoc with your sex life, speak to your GP in the first instance. But be warned: according to some experts, low mood due to the peri-menopause can often be misdiagnosed as depression or anxiety. However, it may be more appropriate to prescribe hormone treatments rather than antidepressants. A steroid treatment - Tibolone - may also improve your sex drive. It's vital that your GP talks through all your options with you, and refers you to a specialist where necessary. For more information and support, contact [Women's Health Concern](#).

How his body changes

It's not just your body that undergoes change, of course. As men grow older, they may find it more difficult to achieve and maintain an erection. It's estimated that half of all men between the ages of 40 and 70 will experience erectile dysfunction at least once. Again, patience and foreplay are key. But if it's a recurring

problem, try to persuade him to talk to his GP about whether Viagra may be appropriate. [Read more on you and your husband's health](#)

STIs are on the rise

And now for a sobering statistic: the rate of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) among the over-45s has more than doubled in under a decade, according to a 2008 survey. The most commonly diagnosed infection among this age group is genital warts, which is caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) being passed from one partner to another during sex. Herpes is the next most common - with chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis not far behind.

So why the big rise in STIs? It seems many of us are taking risks without even realising it. More of us are starting new relationships later in life - and, obviously, the more sexual partners you have, the more you run the risk of catching an STI. And when we reach an age when we're no longer likely to conceive, we become less diligent about contraception.

The solution, of course, is simple: *always* use a condom with a new partner. And if you're concerned about STIs or notice any unusual symptoms, talk to your GP or make an appointment at your local sexual health clinic. You can also call the NHS sexual health helpline on 0800 567123. Visit www.talkchoice.co.uk for more information about contraception choices. [Read more on getting the best from a GP visit](#)

And now the good news...

Believe it or not, there's plenty to look forward to in your sex life as you grow older. The vast majority of couples - an impressive 85% - find sex is less pressurised after turning 50, according to research by Saga. We're generally more comfortable with our bodies, more familiar with our needs and desires - and post-menopause, we don't have any concerns about accidental pregnancies.

Sex gets even better!

It might also cheer you to learn that contrary to popular opinion, 76% of people insist sex *doesn't* become more boring as the years go by. OK, you may not have the energy and flexibility you once had - but fulfilling sex doesn't necessarily mean you should be hanging off the chandeliers. The trick is to learn to relax and enjoy one another's bodies. And finally, it's worth bearing in mind that the ability to have multiple orgasms increases with age, according to research by the Medical Information Service. Yes! Yes! Yes!

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