Sex after Stroke

Sex (sexual intercourse) can be a sensitive subject. The good news is that stroke survivors and their partners can enjoy a fulfilling sex life after a stroke. The sooner you return to your sex life, as long as you’re medically stable, the better.

Being sad, not being able to have or maintain an erection (impotence), difficulty experiencing pleasure, and worrying about how you look are side effects of some drugs. Feeling tired can also affect your sex drive.

**Will I have another stroke during sex?**
Chances are very low. The amount of energy needed for sex is about the same as the energy used to walk up one or two flights of stairs. Talk to your doctor if you’re not sure.

**How will my partner respond to me?**
You may wonder if your partner is turned off by the changes caused by stroke. Your partner may worry that sex could cause pain. You’ll both need time to adjust. Share your feelings, and talk to a therapist if needed.

**What if I have trouble talking?**
You may be dealing with aphasia (loss of speech). You know what you want to say but can’t make the words come out right, or you may not understand what someone else is saying. Touch can be an important if you are having trouble talking. It shows warmth, caring and desire.

**Start with these tips:**

**Express yourself openly.** Sometimes sharing your thoughts and feelings can ease your worries.

**Start slowly.** At first you may want to try gentle touch or other ways of being close instead of sex. Search for what feels good — and speak up! Your partner can’t read your mind.

**Rest up and plan ahead for sex.** You’ll both be at your best when you’re not tired and when you have planned alone time to spend together. Rest can also boost sexual activity. Be sure and allow enough time for slower physical responses.

**Keep track of the drugs you take.**
Sleeping pills may make you less alert, so avoid them if you can. If you take high blood pressure medicine, plan for sex before your daily dose, which may help you avoid impotence caused by some high blood pressure medicines. Other drugs like tranquilizers, sleeping pills, antidepressants and antihistamines can lower sex drive or cause impotence.

If you’re a woman, some forms of birth control may be better than others. (Talk to your doctor if you want to get pregnant. You need to learn the effects of pregnancy on your body and the risks involved.)
Find a comfortable position. A common effect of stroke is weakness or paralysis (loss of feeling) on one side of the body. You may need to change your usual position for sex. If you’re a man with one-sided paralysis the missionary position (man on top) won’t work for you. Instead, your partner might try being on top, or you might try a side-lying position.

Take time to experiment. Your sense of touch may be changed after a stroke. For example, if you’re paralyzed on one side, your partner may forget about the affected area. Remind him or her to approach you from the non-paralyzed size. Rediscover what you and your partner enjoy.

Take time for yourself. Careful grooming and attractive clothes can help you feel your best. This may take extra effort at first, but the results are worthwhile. Even small steps can help you accept your new self, regain confidence and fight depression.

Caregivers take breaks — and don’t feel guilty about it. You don’t want to end up feeling like a parent instead of a partner. Encourage fun whenever you can. Laughter and playfulness can help you maintain an adult relationship.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 8/2017 University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7699