



by Richard Boroditsky

Special to Lifestyles 55+

## Is there sex after 55?

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From movies and TV shows to magazines and books, our attention is often drawn to one topic: sex. While we are bombarded by sexual imagery on a daily basis, these images rarely encompass the 55+ age group. If no one sees it and no one talks about it, one must ask: is there sex after age 55?

Let's start by taking a look at the way our society defines sex. In most of the developed world, sex is considered to be equivalent to sexual intercourse. We associate sex with other societal norms, like marriage and reproduction. As young people and elderly people may not engage in sexual intercourse or reproduction, they are often not viewed as sexual beings.

In other countries around the world (for example, Scandinavian countries), sexual norms are based more on sexuality as opposed to intercourse. In these countries, the term "sex" covers a wider range of activities than just intercourse. These activities are seen as part of a person's normal sexual behaviour.

With our society's narrow definition of sex, it's no wonder sex after age 55 has become such a taboo topic. I often ask my patients if they are involved in any form of sexual activity, and many are afraid to discuss it.

One of the most common concerns I encounter is decreased sexual desire. A decrease in sexual desire is a normal part of the aging process, with chronic illness, relationship changes, and even boredom serving as contributing factors.

A woman's partner may also play a role in her lack of sexual activity. Both men and women may find their spontaneous desire for sex diminishes as they age and their sexual response slows. More emotional and physical stimulation may be needed to become aroused. A woman may no longer have a partner, or may have a partner who is not able to have erections.

Another common concern is vaginal dryness and pain during sex. As a woman ages, she experiences decreased blood flow and estrogen levels, which leads to a thinner vaginal lining. This thinning makes the vagina more prone to bleeding and pain.

A small group of women are found to be testosterone deficient. Testosterone is necessary for orgasmic function and arousal. Approximately 50 per cent of women who have had their ovaries removed are also deficient in testosterone, which can cause dramatic changes in a woman's sexual health. Low doses of testosterone may be beneficial for this group of women, though for the vast majority of women with decreased libidos testosterone is not the answer.

Although there are many factors which may prevent a woman from engaging in sexual intercourse, she can still be sexual.

So is there sex after age 55? The answer is yes – and it begins with women giving themselves permission to explore other forms of sexual activity aside from intercourse.

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*Sexual response slows as people age.*

*utilizing a nurse-managed, interdisciplinary team approach, with an emphasis on health promotion and disease prevention.*