

# Sexy after 60 and over

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"If you want my body and you think I'm sexy,

Come on sugar let me know..."

— *Da Ya Think I'm Sexy*

Is the 64-year-old rocker Rod Stewart who sang those words still a sex symbol or just an aging man who hasn't called it quits yet? As the tail end of the Baby Boomers turn 50 and the thousands at the front end enter their 60s, the North American stereotype of sexuality belonging exclusively to the young is beginning to change.

According to Dr. Michael Stephensen, specialist in Sexual Medicine at Winnipeg's Mature Women's Centre at Victoria General Hospital, attitudes toward sexual activity and age have become more open in recent years. Doctors are increasingly seeing older patients requesting sexual information and medication.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s was triggered to a large extent by availability of birth control pills for women.

Dr. Stephensen attributes the advent of erection-enhancing medications as working in a similar way.

"There is no question that the availability of Viagra, a safe, convenient and effective treatment for erectile dysfunction, has changed the way we think about sexual activity after age 50," he said.

Our sexual function naturally declines with age, but as couples live longer, they want their relationships to remain intimate. The Multinational Survey of the Aging Male reported in 2003 that 65 per cent of men between the ages of 70 and 80 were having sex at least once a month. In addition, the study showed that, between the ages of 50 and 80, sexual frequency for men averaged 5.8 times per month.

Other studies have yielded similar results. Dr. Stephensen said this shows an interest among older men (and presumably couples) to keep their relationships warm, close and intimate. Pharmaceutical advances are helping

achieve this goal, but some healthcare professionals are lagging behind.

## Overcoming common problems

As we age, we face physiological, and sometimes psychological, changes that cause sexual problems.

Menopause practitioner at the Mature Women's Centre Lois Glover said women are commonly affected by dyspareunia, which is painful intercourse and loss of libido. Dyspareunia occurs for a variety of reasons, but one of the main causes is estrogen loss occurring at menopause. For many women, this can be treated with vaginal estrogen. Women who shouldn't or choose not to use estrogen can try vaginal moisturizers such as Replens or personal lubricants such as Astroglide or O'My. Painful intercourse can also be caused by medications and vascular disease resulting from hypertension, diabetes and smoking.

Women's loss of libido typically has more than one cause. Most often a decrease in libido relates to personal

stress, physical or mental health issues, medications, substance abuse, poor self image or quality of their intimate relationship. The solution usually involves reducing stress and helping enhance intimacy.

For most men, erection enhancing medications such as Viagra, Cialis and Levitra are safe and effective. While these medications do not cause heart attacks — a common misconception — they are dangerous when mixed with nitroglycerine, commonly prescribed to treat heart pain or angina.

Dr. Stephensen recommends seeing your family doctor or pharmacist if you require help with your sexual health. Most problems can be resolved with frank, open communication. Occasionally a doctor may feel the need to refer a couple to some specialized service.

The Mature Women's Centre at the Victoria Hospital provides many services for older women. Unfortunately, Manitoba doesn't have a similar facility for men.