Sexual problems and the menopause

Increasingly, women are staying sexually active into their seventies and beyond. Thus, any sexual problems need to be addressed by healthcare and allied healthcare professionals.

Main types of sexual dysfunction

- Desire disorders
- Arousal disorders
- Orgasm disorders
- Pain disorders

These categories are not exclusive and can overlap, and one may cause another.

Assessment

- Sexual history
- Sexual problems, pregnancies, postpartum complications, sexual abuse
- Localization of any pain or discomfort
- Current sexual functioning and practices
- Partner’s sexual problems (e.g. erectile dysfunction)
- Medical history
- Co-morbid medical conditions that affect sexual desire and arousal
- Surgical and premature menopause
- Living with and beyond cancer
- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Depression
- Thyroid disease
- Medications (especially antidepressants or antipsychotics)
- Validated questionnaires such as the Female Sexual Function Index (FSFI)
- Laboratory testing (to rule out medical conditions such as diabetes and thyroid disease)

Causes of sexual problems after the menopause

- Vaginal dryness
- Chronic ill-health
- Pelvic surgery and radiotherapy
- Difficulties in interpersonal relationships
- Depression and anxiety
- Partner sexual problems

Sexual problems after the menopause may be have been lifelong, pre-existing conditions.

Around one in two women experience sexual problems. These reduce their quality of life and affect their personal relationships.

Treatment options

- Lubricants and moisturizers/vaginal dilators
- Topical estrogens
- Testosterone
- Counselling, sex therapy, psychotherapy, and psychoeducation
- Laser therapy for pain and dryness, although more evidence is required regarding its use
- Vaginal dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) therapy
- Medications such as flibanserin and bremelanotide

Further information

Cleveland Clinic  https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/diseases/9121-sexual-dysfunction

Sexual dysfunction in female cancer survivors: Addressing the problems and the remedies  DOI: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2022.07.010