

# 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 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>