

Menopausal health:

Sexual problems

Increasingly, women are staying sexually active into their seventies and beyond. Thus, healthcare providers need to be trained to deal with sexual problems.

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, post-partum complications, sexual abuse
- Localization of any pain or discomfort
- Current sexual functioning/practices
- Partner's sexual problems (e.g. erectile dysfunction)
- Medical history
- Co-morbid medical conditions that affect sexual desire and arousal:
 - cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, thyroid disease
- Surgical and premature menopause
- Living with and beyond cancer
- Medications (especially anti-depressants 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)

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

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

Treatment options

- Lubricants and moisturizers/vaginal dilators
- Topical estrogens
- Testosterone
- Counseling, 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

Sexual problems may be chronic or appear after previous normal sexual functioning.

Further information

Paschou et al. (2024). Sexual health and wellbeing and the menopause: an EMAS clinical guide <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2024.108055>

Conn & Hodges (2026). MSD Manual: Overview of sexual function and dysfunction in women (consumer version) <https://www.msmanuals.com/home/women-s-health-issues/sexual-function-and-dysfunction-in-women/overview-of-sexual-function-and-dysfunction-in-women>