



Living Healthy & Loving Healthy: A Guide for Cardiac Patients & Their Partners

Medications

Some medicines may cause changes in mood and sexual function for both men and women. If you notice changes in your sexual function, there are options and choices to explore. You may simply need a change in your medicine or the time that you take your medicine. There are many options that can be helpful for vaginal dryness or erectile dysfunction. Always talk with your pharmacist or doctor before using any over-the-counter products or prescription medicine. Some of these products and medicines can be harmful when taken together.

Emotions

Changes in mood can be expected after a cardiac event. You may be concerned about sexual function and changes in body image. You may be nervous for yourself or your partner. Allow yourself time to heal. With time, patience and a caring partner, you can expect to be intimate again.

Communication

We communicate in many ways-- talking, hugging, touching (a comforting hand), body language. Honest communication is the best way for you and your partner to feel comfortable. We suggest you be honest and open about what you are feeling and what makes you feel good.

Participating in sexual activity

Most patients are told that they can participate in sexual activity “when you can climb two flights of stairs without having symptoms”. A more useful answer may be, “when you are comfortable and when you have the desire”. Before sexual activity, it is important to think about many things such as time of day, when you last ate, sexual positioning and your medication schedule.

Interest in sexual activity

After any cardiac event, whether or not it involved angina, surgery or hospitalization, it is important to talk with your partner about what and how you feel. Focusing on coping with your cardiac illness and trying to manage your daily activities may mean that you are not thinking about sex and intimacy. Intimacy is much more than the physical act of intercourse. It may involve touching, talking and holding hands. Allow yourself time to feel desire and to feel desirable.

Using nitroglycerin before sexual activity

It is important to discuss this with your doctor. If you have been told to use nitroglycerine before you take a walk or exercise, it might be useful before sexual activity as well.

***Alcohol interferes with sexual activity***

Alcohol DOES NOT increase sexual functioning. In fact, alcohol lessens sexual functioning and may also cause problems with your medicines.

Sexual activity and your heart rate

Sexual activity makes your breathing and your heart rate faster. Your heart works the hardest during orgasm, very much like climbing two flights of stairs. After sexual activity, you may feel your heart beating faster than usual or you might have angina. If you have chest discomfort or if your heart rate or breathing does not return to normal within fifteen minutes, call your doctor.

Your Heart and Physical Intimacy

To your heart, sexual activity is the same as any other form of exercise. The more physically active your doctor says you are able to be, the better able you are to participate in sexual activity. As you comfortably do more exercise, your body will respond better to stimulation.

Getting Started

Practice makes perfect. It is helpful to get to know your body again (how it works when you are aroused or excited) before having sexual intercourse with your partner. Self-exploration and self-touching can help you with this. Using fantasy can help you to want or desire physical closeness again. People can experience climax or orgasm without being or feeling aroused. This means practicing makes sense even if you are not easily aroused.

Getting Comfortable

Getting to know what happens to your heart and breathing when you become aroused can help you feel more relaxed during sexual activity. This will allow you to talk more easily with your partner about being intimate. Knowing your body will help you to guide your partner so you can both feel safe and relaxed during intimacy.

Helping Your Body and Your Heart

The body responds best to intimacy during the earlier part of the day. This is often a time you will have more energy and stamina. The body responds best to sexual activities if your stomach is almost empty. A full stomach can make your body work harder during sexual activity which may keep your body from responding to your partner. It is helpful to your body when sexual activity happens in a room that has a moderate to cool temperature.

Helping Your Partner

Physical intimacy is one way of connecting and communicating. Give yourself and your partner a chance to talk and share with each other. Nonverbal communication can be very helpful. A long kiss or hug is a message to your partner that you want physical



closeness. This can be an easy and safe way to start talking about intimacy. Giving your partner a loving massage or getting one from your partner are ways to physically connecting again. Using lotions can make this experience more enjoyable. Listening to music while giving massages can make both of you more comfortable. Bathing together can be a fun and relaxing way to share touching and cuddling. Holding your partner while lying in bed or on a couch is another way to begin to feel more comfortable with being physically close. The body always remembers activities that are enjoyable and fun. This is true for both you and your partner.