

# Sexual Health After Stroke

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# Stroke Rehabilitation Program

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## You can do it, we are here to help!

Sex and sexuality are important parts of being human. After having a stroke, many things can change. The way in which you experience your body may be different now. Many individuals who have experienced a stroke are concerned about their sexuality and sexual health but don't know how, who, or when to ask for information.

At Parkwood Institute, we have developed a program to provide education and support to patients regarding sexuality and sexual health. Early in your admission, a member of your health care team will talk to you and answer any questions or concerns you may have about your sexual health. If you have a partner, they are welcome to participate in your sexual health education and ask questions.

***We want you to feel comfortable discussing your questions and concerns with any team member. We will help you find the answers.***

You are not alone. Questions and concerns about sexuality after having a stroke are common. It is important to ask for help.

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## Topics people with stroke often wonder about

- Sexual drive / interest
- Sexual functioning abilities (achieving orgasm, ejaculation, erection, vaginal lubrication)
- Fertility and contraception
- Fatigue and medications effects on sexual health
- Comfortable positions for sexual activity
- Urinary and bowel incontinence
- Relationship challenges
- Attractiveness and sexual self-esteem
- Difficulty expressing emotion

## Frequently asked questions about sexual health after having a stroke:

### Is it safe to have sex?

Yes. For most people it is safe to have sex after having a stroke. There is no evidence that sex can bring about another stroke. If you wish to be sexually active, you can do so whenever you feel comfortable, unless your doctor has advised differently.

### Why has my sex life changed?

Intimacy and sexual function can be affected by having a stroke. Changes to your sex life can be from:

- **Sexual Function:** You may experience changes in your ability to obtain erections and/or vaginal lubrication. There are medications as well as a variety of assistive devices that can assist with erections, lubrication, stimulation and pleasure.

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- **Physical impairments:** Having a stroke may change your ability to move, including sexual positions.
- **Communication barriers:** Having a stroke can change the way you communicate or understand what others are saying. These barriers can make it challenging to have intimate conversations with your partner.
- **Fatigue:** You may feel tired doing everyday activities such as walking or bathing, etc. Fatigue can also impact your sexual desire.
- **Mood changes or less interest in sex:** Depression, anxiety, or changes in self-image may occur after a stroke. These changes may lessen your interest in sexual activity. Studies have shown that it takes, on average, about seven weeks for people to regain their interest in sexual activity after a stroke, which will vary from one person to the next.
- **Medications you are taking:** Certain medications that prevent having another stroke may affect your sexual function
- **Bladder changes:** You may experience changes in bladder control or have a catheter in place. Sexual activity is still possible.

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## How can I cope with these changes to my sex life?

- Talk to your team if you would like general education about sexual health after stroke.
- Your team can also help you learn new strategies, discuss your concerns and answer specific questions related to sexual health.
- Talk with your partner if you have concerns about sexual activity.
- Plan sexual activity at the times of day when you have the most energy.
- Create a setting that is relaxing, comfortable, and sensual.
- Start slowly by doing intimate things such as kissing and hugging.
- Use positioning aids or devices to make sexual activity more comfortable.

## Your emotional and mental health

Having a stroke can affect your whole life. Maintaining intimacy with your loved one is an important way to stay connected emotionally and can help improve your mental health. If you or your partner are looking for resources to learn more about sexual health after a stroke, you are welcome to ask the health care team.

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## Resources about sexual health after a stroke

We have included links and resources on the following pages that you might find helpful. We can also help you access these resources on your own device.

Resource	Website / Location and Description
<b>Comfortable Sex Positions for Patients who have had a Stroke</b>	Available in resource binder on the unit or online: <a href="https://www.uhn.ca/TorontoRehab/Clinics/Outpatient_Stroke_Services/Documents/Comfortable_Sex_Positions_Patients_Who_Have_Had_Stroke.pdf">https://www.uhn.ca/TorontoRehab/Clinics/Outpatient_Stroke_Services/Documents/Comfortable_Sex_Positions_Patients_Who_Have_Had_Stroke.pdf</a>  Useful resource for safe positioning during sexual activity for most people recovering from stroke. Also adapted for those with aphasia.
<b>Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability</b>	Available in resource binder on the unit  Complete sex guide for people who live with disabilities, pain, illness or chronic conditions
<b>PleasureAble: Sexual Device Manual for People with Disabilities</b>	Available online and in resource binder on the unit.  This resource explores a variety of sexual devices, safety, positioning, and lubricants. <a href="http://www.dhrn.ca/files/sexualhealthmanual_lowres_2010_0208.pdf">http://www.dhrn.ca/files/sexualhealthmanual_lowres_2010_0208.pdf</a>
<b>Sexuality Stroke Engine</b>	Available online and in resource binder on the unit  Evidence- based website with information for patients and caregivers <a href="https://strokengine.ca/en/">https://strokengine.ca/en/</a>
<b>American Stroke Association</b>	Available online and in resource binder on the unit

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	<p>Emotional effects of stroke:  <a href="https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/effects-of-stroke/emotional-effects-of-stroke/intimacy-after-stroke">https://www.stroke.org/en/about-stroke/effects-of-stroke/emotional-effects-of-stroke/intimacy-after-stroke</a></p>
<b>Spinal Cord Injury BC Sexual Health</b>	<p>A number of helpful resources that apply to patients with disability, beyond spinal cord injury.  <a href="http://www.scisexualhealth.ca">www.scisexualhealth.ca</a></p>
<b>Come as You Are</b>	<p>Online store <a href="http://www.comeasyouare.com">www.comeasyouare.com</a></p>
<b>Spot of Delight Shop</b>	<p>Online and store in London. Accessible sex toys and devices are available online or in the store.  <a href="http://www.spotofdelight.com">www.spotofdelight.com</a></p>
<h2>Professional Resources in London Ontario</h2>	
<b>Sex Therapists</b>	<p>All sex therapists in London are registered with Board of Examiners in Sex Therapy and Counseling in Ontario. Search by city or individual therapist on <a href="http://www.bestco.info.therapistlocator.php">www.bestco.info.therapistlocator.php</a></p>
<b>Urology Program at St. Joseph's Hospital</b>	<p>Dr. G Brock and Dr. J Campbell specialize in erectile dysfunction. Assessment and treatment options can be discussed. Phone: 519 646-6100 ext. 66053</p>
<b>Fertility Clinic at London Health Sciences Centre</b>	<p>Appointment for consultation by physician referral or patients can self-refer. Phone: 519-663-2966</p>
<b>Pelvic Floor Physiotherapists in London</b>	<p>Many physiotherapy (PT) clinics provide these services. The college of PTs has a list of all Pelvic Health PTs in Ontario. <a href="http://PublicRegister.CPOPortal.collegept.org">Public Register - CPO Portal (collegept.org)</a>. Click on 'Advanced Search' button under 'Special Activities', select "Assessing/Rehabilitating Pelvic Musculature". From there, narrow the search to your geographical area.</p>

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**For additional information about sexual health,  
please speak to a member of your Health Care  
Team.**

**POSITIVE  
SPACE**

