



Wendy Trainor
communication and healing

Heart disease and sexuality

Whether or not people can be sexually active is one of the top three concerns of patients after they have had a heart attack. Will I live, will I be able to work and will I be able to be sexual. Many who have heart disease assume that they can no longer be sexually active. Their partners may be afraid to have sex with them for fear it will trigger a heart attack. The rule of thumb is that if you can climb two flights of stairs, you can be sexually active.

It is important that you consult with your physician preferably, accompanied by your spouse who quite likely will also have concerns. Explain that sex is an important part of your life and that you want to know what changes you need to make in your sex life, if any. Also ask if any of the medications that you have been prescribed have any sexual side effects.

Many patients experience depression after a heart attack and depression can have a negative impact on sexual functioning. If this is true for you it is important to get treatment. Therapy, medications and physical activity all promote psychological healing. Keep in mind that medications for depression can have a negative impact on sexual functioning – lowering desire or causing delayed ejaculation.

The same hardening of the arteries that causes heart problems can lead to a constriction of blood flow to your genitals causing erectile problems in men and compromising arousal in women.

Remember that many physicians have had little or no training in sexuality and may not be comfortable or competent discussing sexual concerns and problems. You can ask for a referral to a sex therapist.

Affection, touching and intimacy make life enjoyable. Sexual pleasure is one of the basic constants in life. It is available to both young and old, healthy and not so healthy. Just as you may not be able to run a marathon anymore, but you can take pleasure in walking around the block, your sex life may slow down but can continue to be very pleasurable.

Sex therapists report a greater success rate with couples in their sixties and seventies than with younger couples. Success in sex therapy depends on a couple's commitment, their ability to discuss feelings and sexual requests, their desire for touching and eroticism and flexibility in utilizing pleasuring and erotic techniques, not how old they are or how healthy they are.

Wendy Trainor, MSW, RSW, RMFT, offers individual and relationship therapy and specializes in sex therapy. For more information or an appointment, contact Wendy at 416.204.0336 or wtrainor@sympatico.ca.

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