Information NOW
Information for people in Newcastle upon Tyne

Sex in Later Life

Age should not be a barrier to enjoying a satisfying sexual relationship. Although your body may change and health issues may affect your ability or your desire to have sex, research has shown that older people with active sex lives stay fitter and live longer than those that don't.

As I get older can I still have sex?

If you feel like it, there is no reason why sex should not continue as you get older. There are no limits, providing the desire is there for both partners. However, if you feel no sexual desire, or less than in earlier life, that should not be seen as a problem either.

Remember, that as an older person you are entitled to your sexuality. It is perfectly acceptable for you to have sexual feelings and for couples to have sexual feelings about each other. Even when the desire and ability to have intercourse has declined, many older adults find that the need for touch and intimacy continues over many years.

Sexual Health

Research has shown that one in ten people over the age of 50 are at risk of contracting a sexually transmitted infection because they are not using appropriate contraception. We have listed here some of the more common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) that can occur as a result of unprotected sex:

- Chlamydia
- Genital warts
- Gonorrhoea
- Herpes
- HIV
- Syphilis

For further information about the symptoms, possible complications and treatment of STIs, visit the **NHS** website.

Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle at New Croft Centre provides sexual health support. This includes: contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You can **request a free home testing kit online** or book a face to face appointment for help with:

- contraception, condoms or coil fitting

- emergency contraception
- sexual assault support
- HIV testing or treatment if you have been exposed to HIV (PrEP and PEP)
- Chems support
- young people's clinic with **Streetwise**
- relationships
- pregnancy advice

Blue Sky Trust offer 1:2:1 and peer support and run workshops for people living with HIV in the north east.

Terence Higgins Trust offer information and resources for people diagnosed with or living with HIV.

For more information on local HIV information and social care support please visit **newcastle.gov.uk**

Sex and your health

It may be that you start to encounter problems and health worries that you did not have as a younger person, and which may affect your attitude towards sex.

As well as the physical problems that can occur as a result of older age or certain health concerns, there are also emotional issues that can affect your desire to have a sexual relationship.

Consent

Sexual violence can happen at any point in a person's life. The range includes rape, molestation, sexual threats, harassment and forced exposure to pornography. Sexual violence against older adults occurs in their homes and other places in the community, as well as in institutional settings, such as long term care facilities. Historically older people have not been considered potential or actual targets of sexual violence. There are many reasons for this, including ageist beliefs that they are not sexual beings and are not sexually desirable. Misconceptions regarding rape include that sexual violence is a crime of passion rather than an act of violence and also that rape only happens to younger people.

Sexual assault or rape

If someone forces you to do something you do not want to do of a sexual nature, it is never your fault and it is not okay. If this has happened to you, you should report it or speak to someone you trust to get help and support. Any sort of sexual activity without consent is illegal whatever the age of the people involved and whatever your relationship.

Sexual violence can happen at any point in a person's life and violent sexual behaviour is similar across the age range. This includes rape, molestation, sexual threats, harassment and forced exposure to pornography. Sexual violence against adults and children often occurs in their homes and other places in the community, as well as in institutional settings, such as long term

care facilities. There are misconceptions regarding rape, including the myth that sexual violence is a crime of passion rather than an act of violence and also that rape only happens to younger people.

Rape Crisis Tyneside & Northumberland support women and girls of any age who have experienced sexual violence.

REACH is the north east SARC (Sexual Assault Referral Centre) providing 24-hour crisis intervention and support for anyone who has experienced a sexual offence, regardless of when the offence occurred or whether the incident was reported to the police or not.

If you are unable to give consent or you feel pressured, scared or you're drunk or high and a person still has sex or a sexual activity with you, this is a sexual assault or rape.

Impotence

Impotence (or erectile dysfunction) can occur temporarily at any stage in a man's life, but is more common in older age and can become more persistent. It affects around one in five men over the age of 40 and around half of all men who have diabetes. It is also common after prostate surgery. The good news is that it is treatable. There are various types of treatment available such as tablets, gels and injections, or counselling if the problem is psychological. Speak to your GP who will establish the likeliest cause of the problem and will advise on the best form of treatment for you. Read more on **NHS** website.

It is also known that drinking too much alcohol and smoking can lead to problems with impotence, so it always a good idea to cut down on these. See our sections on **Healthy eating and drinking** and **Giving up smoking** for further information and advice.

Menopause

As well as the usual symptoms associated with the **Menopause**, such as hot flushes and insomnia, it also triggers physical changes that may make some types of sex more difficult or painful, as the vagina becomes narrower and produces less lubrication. There are several lubrication products that can help with this problem, which are widely available from pharmacists.

The menopause can also have many emotional effects. As the levels of oestrogen produced by your body reduce dramatically, and you are no longer fertile, this can have a psychological effect and can result in a lack of confidence. However, many women find that they feel more relaxed about sex when they no longer have to worry about becoming pregnant. Read more on **NHS** website.

Health Conditions

Having a health condition can cause problems in your sex life, but there can be ways to improve any negative effects.

- **Arthritis** – Painful joints can make sex uncomfortable. Painkillers and taking a warm bath before sex may help, or you could try a different sexual position.

- **Heart disease** **or** **high blood pressure** – Sex places extra demands on your heart and increases your blood pressure. Having a heart condition may also increase your anxiety levels and affect your libido, so it is a good idea to speak to your GP if you are experiencing difficulties.

- **Hysterectomy** – A woman should be physically able to have sex approximately eight weeks after a hysterectomy, but there may be psychological problems that prevent you from doing so. This can be helped by **counselling**.

- **Dementia** – Dementia can affect a person's desire to have a sexual relationship. It can also have an effect on the other partner, as the relationship changes. The Alzheimer's Society more information on **Sex and dementia**.

Medication

Some medications can affect your ability or desire to have sex, such as drugs for diabetes and blood pressure, or antidepressants. You should always consult your GP if you think that the medication you have been prescribed is causing problems, either physically or emotionally.

Contraception and protection

As you get older and your body changes, you may no longer need to consider contraception (birth control) as part of your sexual relationship. However, if this is still an issue for you then there are many different methods of contraception available. Some methods also provide protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

There are several types of contraception, which work in different ways. Barrier methods are available, such as male and female condoms. Women can also use hormonal methods of contraception, such as the pill, or mechanical contraceptive devices, such as an IUD (sometimes referred to as a coil) that is placed in the womb.

Before recommending a contraceptive, your GP will assess your age, medical history, and sexual lifestyle. No contraceptive is 100% reliable, and some have possible side effects. It is therefore important to consider these factors when deciding what sort of protection to use.

Condoms are available for free from your family planning clinic, sexual health clinic, or GUM (genitourinary medicine) clinic. They may also be available from your GP. You can also buy male and female condoms from chemists, as well as from vending machines, supermarkets, garages and other shops.

You may need to change your contraception as you get older, after having children, or if your sexual lifestyle changes. It is worth remembering that the condom is the only form of contraception that also protects you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

For more information on contraception and protection, visit the **NHS website**.

Local help and advice

Relate can provide sex therapy for people who are having problems with their sex life due to physical or emotional reasons. Problems can include loss of desire, erectile dysfunction, premature ejaculation or pain during intercourse. A therapist will take time to explore with you what you want to achieve or change in your sexual relationship and what the reasons behind this might be. They will then discuss the best way forward.

Read more on InformationNOW about:

- **local sexual health support**
- **finding a partner**

Other useful information

5 things to know about sex in later life from Age UK

Sex in later life from Age UK

The joy of sex in later life Relate UK

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Useful Organisations

Tyneside Womens Health

Email: enquiries@tynesidewomenshealth.org.uk

Website: www.tynesidewomenshealth.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 477 7898

Address: Wilfred Street, NE6 1JQ

Relate Northumberland and Tyneside

Email: northeast@relate.org.uk

Website: https://www.relate.org.uk/

Telephone: 0191 232 9109

Address: MEA House, NE1 8XS

Gay Men Tyneside (GMT)

Email: gmtcommittee@gay-men-tyneside.org.uk

Website: www.gay-men-tyneside.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 233 1333

Address: c/o Mesmac, NE1 8QH

Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle

Email: SexualHealth.4Newcastle@nhs.net

Website: https://sexualhealthservices4newcastle.co.uk/

Telephone: 0191 229 2999

Address: Sexual Health Services 4 Newcastle, NE4 6AU

Telephone: 0191 229 2999

Blue Sky Trust

Email: info@blueskytrust.org

Website: https://www.blueskytrust.org

Telephone: 07989 155175

Address: The Castlegate, NE1 2JQ

Rape Crisis Tyneside and Northumberland

Email: enquiries@rctn.org.uk

Website: www.rctn.org.uk

Telephone: 0191 222 0272

Address: PO Box 1320, NE99 5DX

Terence Higgins Trust

Website: https://www.tht.org.uk/

Telephone: 0808 802 1221

Address: 439 Caledonian Road , N7 9BG

Safer Transport Northumbria

Website:
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nutshellapps.safertransportnorthumbria

Telephone: 0808 802 1221

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