

Body Image and Self-Esteem

Many people with disabilities wonder if they will still be seen as attractive. They also may feel much less positive about their own body and feel less confident about their appearance.

Unfortunately, many people in our society believe that people with disabilities are not sexual and don't experience sexual feelings and thoughts. These misconceptions and stereotypes can be difficult to overcome.

Regaining self-esteem and confidence

It is important to feel good about yourself and your appearance. At the beginning you may find that you need to spend more time getting ready to socialize than you did before. With time and experience you will begin to feel more confident and comfortable with yourself.

Feeling good about your appearance

It is really important to get specific information on grooming and dress from the health professionals that you work with. We all know that how we present ourselves to the world is essential to how we feel about ourselves. Stylish, attractive clothing, good hygiene, even the car we drive make a statement to the world about who we are. Be creative in searching out options so that you can present yourself to the world in the way that you want to - and not in a manner that someone else determines for you.

There is no doubt that baggy sweatpants are easier to put on and that bulky seams in denim clothing can contribute to skin problems. There are many options though and it is worthwhile to invest energy in finding fashion that is healthy and attractive.

Here are some suggestions:

- Adapt or modify leg bags and tubing. It should not be difficult to modify either leg bags or tubing to a particular style of clothing. Check with a seamstress or tailor to see if they can help you.
- Choose forgiving jeans. Jeans are always popular but can have bumps and ridges that cause skin breakdown. Some brands and styles are softer and less bumpy.
- Keep current fashions in mind. From footwear to hats, clothing and accessory fashions come in and go out. Some people will be more concerned about this than others. Each person should have the chance to express their particular taste.
- Don't be afraid to choose bright clothing. Choose clothing and accessories that help to draw attention to your face so that people look at you instead of your wheelchair or brace.
- Wear clothes or jewelry that really contribute to your own feelings of attractiveness.

Body Image and Self-Esteem

Hygiene and grooming are also an essential part of appearance. Here are a few suggestions that may help:

- Find adaptive aids. Increasingly there are tools and aids available to help with combing hair, applying make-up, brushing and flossing teeth, shaving and nail care. If a tool does not exist then modify one or have one designed.
- Plan for adequate hygiene. Arrange for the attendant care and accessible facilities to allow regular bathing and hair washing and menstrual hygiene. Regular laundering of clothes is important.
- Manage body odor. Keep in mind that there may be odors from bowel and bladder equipment, tracheostomy ties and perspiration. Wheelchair cushions can develop odors and should be cleaned regularly.

Many people with disabilities tell us that they meet nicer people now that they are in a wheelchair. The most significant thing that you can do to attract other people to you is to present yourself to the world as a confident and positive person.

Medical Disclaimer: The above information is not intended nor implied to be a substitute for professional medical advice. Always ask your physician or other qualified health professional about any matter concerning your individual health.

Revised: January, 2007, by Sally Breen, RN, BSN

Copyright: ©2007. This document can be FREELY copied or printed by individual or health care professionals for educational purposes only. Please do not alter or cut and paste material or use without appropriate references.

For further information: Contact the Sexual Health Rehab Service, GF Strong Rehab Centre