

## **Sexuality and Disability**

Sexuality is an essential part of all of us no matter how old we are and what our physical abilities may be. An illness or disability does not decrease a person's capacity to feel sexual. Wanting to love and be loved and to experience sexual pleasure is a big part of the human experience.

There may be physical concerns and changes that need to be dealt with but the most important factor in returning to a healthy sexual life is dealing with your own and your partner's values about sex and disability.

### **Myths and Beliefs about Sexuality and Disability**

Unfortunately, many people in society believe that people who have disabilities are not sexual or capable of having sex. If you had these beliefs prior to your illness or injury it may cause you to feel less sexual. It is important to understand that these beliefs are NOT TRUE.

Here are some examples of myths that are NOT TRUE:

- People automatically lose interest in sex when they have a disability.
- If you can't have an orgasm, there is no point in having sex.
- People with disabilities should only be sexual with other people who have disabilities.
- If I can't have an erection just like before, then I can't be a good lover.
- Once you have a disability you cannot or should not have children.

### **Common Questions**

It is common for people with illnesses or disabilities to have questions about sex and sexuality.

The kind of questions and concerns that you have can depend on when and how you became disabled and what particular type of disability you have.

Common questions include:

- Can I still have sex?
- Will anyone find me attractive now?
- Will I be able to get an erection?
- How can I tell a new partner about what to expect?
- What can I do about my catheter when I want to be sexual?
- Can I still become a parent?

Partners and family members of people with chronic illnesses or disabilities may also have questions of their own.

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## Talking about Sex and Getting Your Questions Answered

Talking openly about sex is difficult for most people so sometimes it may be hard to get the information you need. It is perfectly normal to feel embarrassed when asking questions about sex. You can even begin by saying, "I'm a little embarrassed to bring this up, but I was wondering what might happen when I want to have sex again?"

Remember that you and your partner have a right to get accurate and supportive information about any changes to sexuality you may experience.

## What You Can Do:

- Be curious about the effect your own beliefs have on your feelings of being sexy or sexually attractive.
- Talk with your partner or a counselor about how your values may be affecting your feelings about being sexual.
- Try to make sure that your beliefs about sex and disability are not getting in the way of resuming a healthy sexual life.
- Learn more about medical advances that can help you to be more sexual.

**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.

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