

Sex after 50... or 60 or 70

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Research supports what you may already suspect: people over 50 think sex is important. And they are about as active as younger adults. A 3005-person survey reported in the August 23 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that even in the oldest age group surveyed—those 75-85—more than half of those who are sexually active have sex at least two or three times a month. Twenty-three percent have sex at least every week, and 31% enjoyed oral sex. Being healthy and having a healthy partner is closely related to staying sexually active.

These facts contradict popular myths about sex in later life. Rejecting these myths is an important part of enjoying sex as we age.

Myth 1: “Good sex” means two people with youthful bodies having simultaneous orgasm through intercourse.

Myth 2: A man who is a good lover quickly gets erect when he sees an attractive, nude woman.

Myth 3: A woman who is a good lover has an orgasm after a few minutes of intercourse.

Myth 4: Being sexually attractive means looking like a 20 or 30 year old.

All these myths are false. They are part of an adolescent blueprint of good sex that fits very few couples. Older people need to develop a different blueprint of good sex. If people over 50 try to follow the adolescent model, they end up feeling like failures, and tend to avoid sex. The most frequent reason that older couples stop being sexual is that the man can no longer meet adolescent standards, and stops initiating sex. Other frequent barriers to good sex include feelings of anger, hurt and betrayal between partners.

To fully enjoy their sexuality, older people need a broader definition of good sex that is not narrowly focused on intercourse, but also includes many kinds of pleasurable touch. Learning to communicate with partners about what turns us on, and off, also is important, and so is learning to see our aging bodies as sexy and attractive. And it is crucial to understanding the normal physical changes of aging. For example, older men usually need physical stimulation to become erect, and women need to use a lubricant.

The sex therapists at The Buehler Institute can help older couples with the information and skills they need to develop their own blueprint for sexuality. We can help you learn how to give and get sexual pleasure, how to feel good about your body and your sexuality, and how to communicate effectively with your partner. We can also provide information on physical changes of aging, and the impact of illness and medication on sexuality. Please contact us if you are concerned about having a good sex life as you age.