

# Sexuality and Chronic Kidney Disease

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In Collaboration with Laurentian University and Orillia Soldier's Memorial



## Defining Sexuality and Sexual Problems

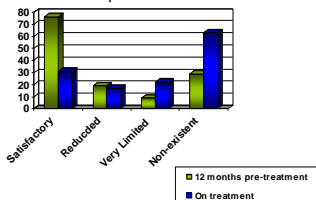
Sexual problems may occur more often for kidney patients than for people in the general public. About 50% of people that have kidney disease have trouble with sexuality, from experiencing a decrease in interest in sex, to not being able to achieve orgasm (Living with Kidney Disease 6-14).

Sexual problems can be emotional or physical.

The following poster is meant to serve as a starting point of information and to help you gain confidence and comfort in having these discussions with your medical team.

## Charts and Study Findings

Sexual Relations with partner before and after treatment



It is not uncommon for someone with Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD) to experience sexual health concerns or problems, especially when receiving a dialysis treatment. Studies have found that reports of sexual dysfunction can range from 9% in predialysis to as high as 70% in dialysis patients. Often there is found to be a correlation between the patients' sexual functioning and their assessment of their overall quality of life.

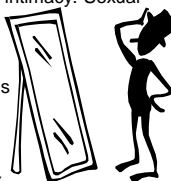
## Causes or Symptoms

### Depression & Anxiety

A common response to the changes you are experiencing is depression. One of the symptoms to depression is loss of sexual interest. Speak with your doctor or social worker if you feel depressed or anxious most of the time. Counseling or anti depressant medications may help.

### Body Image/ Self Esteem

Your level of self-esteem and the way you feel about yourself and your body can affect your sex life. Maintaining your appearance and incorporating some regular exercise will contribute to looking and feeling better. Peritoneal catheters or fistulas and grafts may affect your comfort level with sexual intimacy. Sexual activity is safe for hemodialysis and peritoneal dialysis patients. Talk to your medical team: you may wish to adjust your dialysis treatment options or change your medication to avoid unwanted side effects.



### Fatigue & Desired Frequency

Fatigue is especially high in chronic kidney disease. Not only is the disease every draining on the patient but the treatment is also very demanding. Decreased libido is common in both men & women with CKD.

### Vaginal Dryness

Some women with CKD will experience vaginal dryness. This may require one to experiment more in the arousal phase. There are also a number of creams, lubricates or devices available to improve vaginal moisture.

### Erectile Dysfunction

A common concern for men may be erectile dysfunction (ED) (problems achieving or keeping an erection). Studies show the prevalence of ED of any degree was 80.7% in CKD patients. There are a range of treatment options available, ask your doctor for a complete evaluation of possible causes.

### Medications

Certain medications can be prescribed to address sexual concerns, however there are also medications that can affect one's ability or desire to have intercourse. Ask your doctor or pharmacist to review your medications, they may be able to replace a particular medication for one equally effective.



## Alternatives to Intercourse

"Schedule times for increased structured nurturing of each other. If you don't feel any sexual desire, just cuddle, hug or hold each other. Try massages (light stroking with fingers or feathers feels wonderful). Snuggle into pillows together, create a soft, comfortable environment to spend time together. If there is no lubrication, use one of the many supplementary lubricants available. If there is no erection, use the non-erect penis; don't limit yourself, you have fingers, mouth and hands, lips, other erotic areas. Try sexual aids such as vibrators. If there is no orgasm, don't let it limit you; enjoy the simmer and the sensation and the closeness and the intimacy. Both partners should be sensitive to each other's energy level. **Realize that intercourse is not essential to sexual satisfaction.** Don't blindly agree with the tyrannical myth of the need for intercourse to achieve satisfaction. Explore and find out what's true for the two of you." Sharma Oliver, R.N



## Starting the Discussion

### ...with your doctor

You should be able to feel comfortable talking to your nephrologist, or any member of your medical team. Concerns regarding sexuality are common for patients who have CKD and often the problem can be corrected. It is important not to ignore these concerns. Work with your medical team to find a resolution that works for you.

### ... with your partner

Open communication should be practiced with your partner on an on-going basis. Every individual and every relationship is unique. Ensure that the expectations and limitations of each partner are clearly expressed without judgment or conviction. Open communication can allow for alternatives to be discussed to ensure that sexual satisfaction and/or intimacy is achieved for all partners.



## Supports and Resources

### Your Medical Team:

Your best resource is to talk to your medical team! Nephrologists, renal social workers, family doctors, nurses, dietitians and pharmacists are great supports!

### Peer Supports:

There are a variety of ways to ask questions or share your story and experiences with others who are in the same situation. You can call the Kidney Foundation Peer Support Line or access one of the online discussion boards.

### Print and Online Resources:

There are a number of books on this subject that have been published. There are also a range of online resources that can assist in your journey to better understand the changes in your sexuality and some possible interventions or suggestions.

## References

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