

Sex and MS: How to get your mojo back and keep it that way!

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Many of my MS patients, after several sessions of therapy, gradually reveal that all is not right in the bedroom. They often describe a dwindling sex life, and with it a loss of intimacy generally. This then seeps into day to day relationships, and occasional touches or gestures fade away. Needless to say, the subject is not spoken about, and eventually intimacy disappears altogether.

In MS, sex fades out for the following reasons:

Fatigue: Tiredness is one of the most common symptoms of MS. Getting through the day, attending doctor's appointments, dealing with the kids, trying to keep active, all contribute to leaving you feeling exhausted and drained by evening. The idea of sex before going to sleep can seem laughable.

Low mood: Depression is very common in MS, and one of the most common symptoms is a loss of libido (sex drive). It also results in low self-esteem, and a feeling of not being deserving or worth the attention and pleasure of sex, even when the desire exists.

Negative body image: Chronic illness almost inevitable alters the way we view our bodies and ourselves. MS can leave you feeling unattractive, and some patients experience symptoms that are embarrassing or awkward during intimate moments.

The carer/patient dyad: Many patients and carers tell me that the change in the balance of their relationship can make sex seem taboo. A

chronic illness can change to a readjustment of roles, and often this leads to a more distant relationship.

Effects of medication: medications can often cause fatigue, loss of libido, or emotional changes that can play havoc with your sexual desire and/or performance.

What you can do about it

Talk to each other: a verbal standoff will lead to a physical one, and the only way to get things moving again is to raise the subject. Openly acknowledge your positive and warm feelings towards each other, and plan ways of spending time together as a couple. Even a date night out (or in) would be a good first step.

Don't let fatigue get in the way: Find time to be intimate that isn't the last thing at night. Morning sex, afternoon sex, or weekend sex are likely to work better and get you out of the rut. You don't have to make mad, passionate love - just spend a half hour giving each other a massage and some caressing. Make the room pleasantly warm and gently lit for a relaxing and pleasurable experience.

Talk to your doctors: Your neurologist, GP, or specialist nurse will be able to advise you about medications and supplements that may reduce your fatigue. The MS Society and MS Trust websites have lots of information about managing fatigue.

Ditch the negative thinking! Your body is the same one you had before you were diagnosed, and has the same urges and desires, if you allow it to. Focus on the positive aspects of your physique and how amazing sensual touching and feelings are, in spite of your MS. Practicing mindfulness exercises can help you focus on the pleasure of intimacy, instead of being led astray by negative thoughts about your appearance.

Give your libido a boost: Lubricants, vibrators, and light erotica (books and films) are great at getting your mojo going fast! Lubricants with staying power (*not* KY jelly) are now widely available and can be prescribed by your GP. Feeling confident that sex will be comfortable and arousing will help you look forward to intimacy rather than see it as a chore to be avoided.

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