

Sex and Heart Disease

Several physical changes occur during sex for everyone.

- As you get aroused, your breathing and your heart rate slowly increases along with a slow rise in your blood pressure, while your skin gets slightly flushed.
- As you get more excited, sexual tension builds and your heart rate and blood pressure also rise.
- After orgasm, your heart rate, blood pressure and breathing rate returns to normal.
- People who have heart disease respond just like other people.

Sex After Being Diagnosed With Heart Disease

Usually after being hospitalized with heart disease, both men and women resume sex within a few weeks. It all depends on the individual for the time when you and your partner are ready. If you have questions, ask your doctor.

Some people feel anxious, depressed, or have lack of desire. You may become more aware of your heart beating, breathing and muscle tightening. This is normal, so don't worry.

You can start slowly with you and your partner touching, holding, and caressing, without feeling the pressure to perform. Gradually bring intercourse into the relationship, which takes slightly more energy than other sexual activities.

Factors That Can Inhibit Sexual Activity:

Psychological factors may be caused by being depressed, sad, and afraid. You might have trouble sleeping or sleeping too much. You might have gained or lost weight, or feel tired all the time. These feeling are common and most go away within a few months. If not talk to your doctor about counseling.

Medicine can factor into sexual problems. Blood pressure pills, fluid pills, tranquilizers, antidepressants, and some medication used for chest pain or irregular heartbeat may affect sexual desire in some people. Men may be unable to have an erection or have a premature ejaculation. Women may not have enough vaginal fluid, which causes painful intercourse, or inability to become aroused and have an orgasm. If you have any of these changes, don't

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stop your medicine, consult your doctor. Often your doctor can change the type of medication or the dosage to solve the problem.

Resuming Sex

Here are some ways to make resuming sex easier:

- Open communication with your partner. Tell your partner your fears, concerns and also what makes you feel more relaxed.
- Have a healthy daily routine of diet, exercise, rest and medicine.
- If you smoke, quit.
- Be patient with yourself.
- Avoid rushing into sex to prove things are "back to normal."
- Don't expect too much at first.
- Choose a time when you're both rested and free from stress.
- Wait one to three hours after eating a full meal before having sex.
- Choose a familiar, peaceful place.

What happens if You Have Symptoms During Sex?

If you have angina symptoms (feeling pressure, pain or discomfort in the jaw, neck, chest or stomach, marked shortness of breath or very rapid or irregular heartbeats) during sex, tell your partner, reduce your activity and take medicine (Nitroglycerin) if your doctor has prescribed it. If pain does not go away, then get medical help.

What About Medicine to Aid With Sexual Intercourse?

There are several medications that are prescribed and some over the counter that help with erectile dysfunction, and decreased sexual desire. Check with your physician before taking any of these medications because there can be some serious drug interactions.

Conclusion

When you and your partner feel better about sex, other areas of your lives may improve. Heart disease may alter your life in ways you don't like. But it also can allow you to reflect on what's important. Take advantage of it. How you relate to your family and friends may get even better.

Taken from the guidelines of the American Heart Association. For more information call 1-800-AHA-USA1 or online at americanheart.org