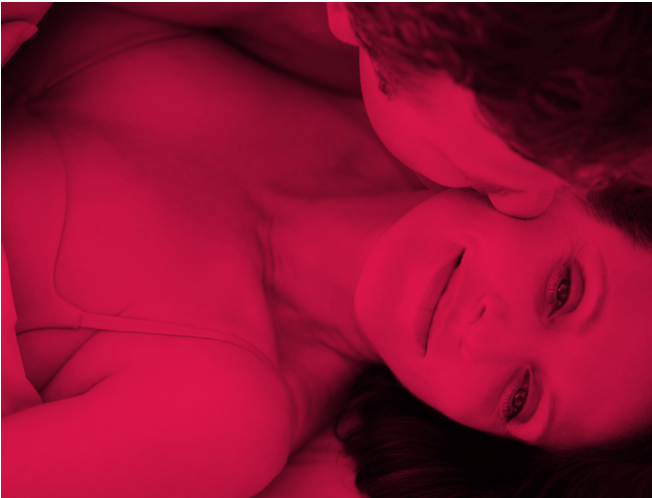


CHRONIC PAIN AND SEXUAL INTIMACY ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE!



Chronic pain affects every aspect of a person's life.

Including his or her sex life, which, in many cases, gets treated as a low-priority issue or is simply ignored. Sex is important for single people but also for couples, where it plays an important role in keeping every aspect of the relationship healthy. That is why attending to your sex life is so essential, even if you suffer from chronic pain.

Sexual intimacy serves a number of purposes:

Pleasure: Human beings need pleasure to maintain a healthy balance in their lives. But for people who suffer from chronic pain, pleasure is often sadly missing. That includes the pleasure associated with sexual activity, which, for various reasons, is greatly

reduced or stops altogether. In some cases, sexual activity increases pain, and if sex is no longer enjoyable, people tend to avoid it.

Intimacy and connection: Relationships can be seriously tested when a person suffers from chronic pain. Not only does your partner have to bear more responsibilities for daily tasks and household obligations, but he or she can feel frustrated, discouraged, and even burned out. To avoid creating distance and alienation, it is highly recommended that you continue or begin setting aside special time just for the two of you. Putting a "date night" on your calendar allows you to touch base with each other and enjoy quality time as individuals and as a couple. It also fulfils the universal human need for affection and physical contact (e.g., kissing, caressing and touching).

Regular sexual activity is beneficial in many ways:

- It helps you be fully aware of your body and feel good in it.
- It increases the production of endorphins (the "happy hormones" secreted by the brain).
- It stimulates the immune system.
- It reduces stress.
- It helps you sleep.

Not feeling the sexual desire? Here's a little advice:

Some of the medications you may be taking for your pain can have unpleasant side effects, such as reducing sexual desire or impairing sexual function. Pain itself may have a similar effect, as can anxiety or depression. If you are having this type of problem, the following can help:

- Talk to your partner. Good communication helps you understand each other, help each other and satisfy each other's needs.
- Talk to your doctor. These are very common issues, and additional consultations can be helpful in assessing the specific nature of your problem. For example, your doctor may refer you to a sex therapist, a physiotherapist or an occupational therapist.
- Make sure you are getting all the right medical, pharmaceutical and psychological treatment for your pain, depression and anxiety.
- You get to decide when it's the right time for sex! Sex can be spontaneous or planned, depending on what you need and how you are feeling. Take into account the time of day when your pain is at its lowest, or when you tend to have the most energy.
- Take a hot bath (alone or with your partner) followed by a good massage. This will help you feel more relaxed, which will make you more receptive to intimate relations.

- Make your sex life more fun and interesting by finding little ways to boost your libido, and make sure that you get as much pleasure from sex as your partner does.
- Experiment with new positions that are comfortable for you, or try manual or oral stimulation.
- Remember that tenderness, communication and understanding are keys to sexual satisfaction.

You can learn how to take control of your sex life, even if you suffer from chronic pain. Make sure that the pleasure of intimacy and sexual fulfillment are an integral part of your relationship. You will find it will have a positive impact on every other aspect of your life!