

PAIN, SEX AND INTIMACY

Sex and physical intimacy should be a source of joy and pleasure, but can become difficult or scary if one partner is worried they'll hurt the other or cause a pain flare-up. Chronic pain can interfere with sex because of the pain itself or as a result of related factors such as the presence of mood disorders, a decreased sex drive or side-effects of certain medications. However, sex can also be good for pain due to the endorphins that are released during moments of pleasure and intimacy.

Some ways to support intimacy while living with pain include:

- **Keeping the lines of communication open:** You and your partner should maintain clear and open communication to make sure you can enjoy being intimate together.
- **Asking for your needs to be met:** Things can change when living with pain, and this is no different with sex. Make sure you're honest with your partner about what feels good and what doesn't.
- **Keeping the passion alive:** Allow yourself time to adjust to how your body is feeling in the moment and engage your partner in finding ways to maintain the passion in your relationship.

MYTHS ABOUT SEX

- Sex should be spontaneous; planning or talking about it in advance is not necessary
- Sex should be adventurous and exciting every time
- Sex is only for young, beautiful and pain-free people
- Everyone else is having frequent sex
- If your partner isn't sexually satisfied, they will go elsewhere for intimacy

If you are finding sex painful or difficult, check to see if you're aiming for something real and not a myth.

HINTS AND TIPS FOR HEALTHY INTIMACY WHILE LIVING WITH PAIN

Get your head in the game

- You have a lot to offer. Having chronic pain does not take that away but it can knock your confidence, change your mood and take up a lot of headspace.
- Examine your emotions and remember you have the ability to be a loving and fun partner.
- If emotional blocks come up in the form of worries and fears, take the time to work through them.

Don't rush in

- Take your time, allow for adaptation to any differences with your body and how it works now, as opposed to before pain.
- Accept yourself the way you are in the present, regardless of pain levels.
- This doesn't mean accepting things are never going to change, it just means making peace with how things are right now and then making the best out of it. Your partner will likely follow your lead so go for it!

Experiment with ways to get comfortable

- You may find it more comfortable to take on a less active role during sex. Let your partner know if that's what you need.
- If you have difficulty finding a position that is comfortable, try the position you feel most comfortable when sleeping, sitting or standing and adapt it to your sexual activity.

Find opportunities for intimacy without intercourse

- You can be intimate without having sex, and a healthy intimate relationship can positively affect all aspects of your life.
- Make time to be alone with your partner – take a bath together, share a candlelight dinner, take a gentle walk together, or just hold each other in bed.

It's worth it to plan ahead

- Intimacy can be more satisfying if you plan for it in advance.
- If you take medication for pain, you can take it in advance of engaging in intimacy with your partner to help with possible side-effects.
- If you plan enough time to try new things or adapt what you've done in the past, it can put your mind at ease and reduce psychological and physical tension knowing that you don't have to rush to your next activity.

Seek help from the experts

- If you need more support than you can get from your partner, other people you trust, books or other resources, don't be afraid to reach out to a counsellor.

RESOURCES

- <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/support-relationships/chronic-pain-and-sex>
- <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/support-relationships/four-keys-to-satisfying-sex-when-you-live-with-chronic-pain>
- <http://painconcern.org.uk/sex-chronic-pain/>
- <https://www.liveplanbe.ca/pain-education/support-relationships/two-ways-to-lift-emotional-barriers-to-intimacy>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/think-act-be/201706/what-happens-when-partners-fight-chronic-pain-together>
- <https://themighty.com/topic/fibromyalgia/intimacy-relationships-chronic-pain/>