

Sexuality in Mid & Later Life

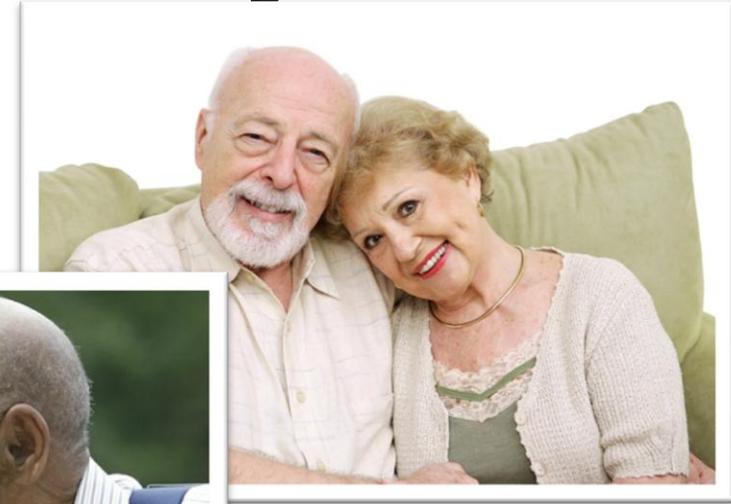
Amber Brown
Education & Training Manager
Planned Parenthood Keystone
abrown@planitpa.org
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Objectives

- Review the key facts regarding changes in sexuality at mid-life and beyond.
- Identify common issues older adults face in regard to sexuality.
- Evaluate the suggested guidelines appropriate for sexual decision making, including people with limited mental or physical capabilities.

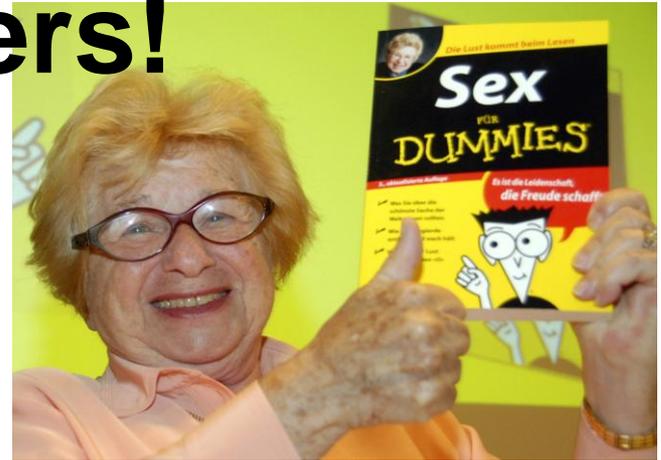
Why older adult sexuality?

- Humans are sexual beings throughout our lives.
- Sexuality does not have an expiration date.



Sexual Health Matters!

- Sexuality is a positive, life-affirming force.



- A part of our physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Contributes to our overall sense of well-being.
- Can be a source of love, affection, intimacy and happiness.

A Long Ignored Topic....

Older adult sexuality has long been ignored. Why?

- We live in an ageist society that often assumes sex is for the young.
- We are uncomfortable discussing sexuality in general.
- We don't have the information or tools to have these discussions.
- We don't view sexual health as a primary concern for older adults.

What we risk...

Some of the concerns we face if we don't address older adult sexuality include:

- Untreated pain or discomfort.
- Sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Sexual abuse and/or sexual violence.
- Negative impact on the happiness and self-esteem of older adults.

Myths about Sexuality & Aging

Myths

- Sexuality is only expressed through intercourse and/or older people are incapable of sexual intercourse.
- Sexual dysfunction is an inevitable result of the aging process and/or sexual satisfaction diminishes in old age.
- Older women have been “relieved of the burden” of sex after menopause.
- Institutionalized elders don’t have sexual needs.
- Older people who have sexual fantasies and interests are lecherous and disgusting.

Reality!

Older adults continue to be sexual beings!



Facts!

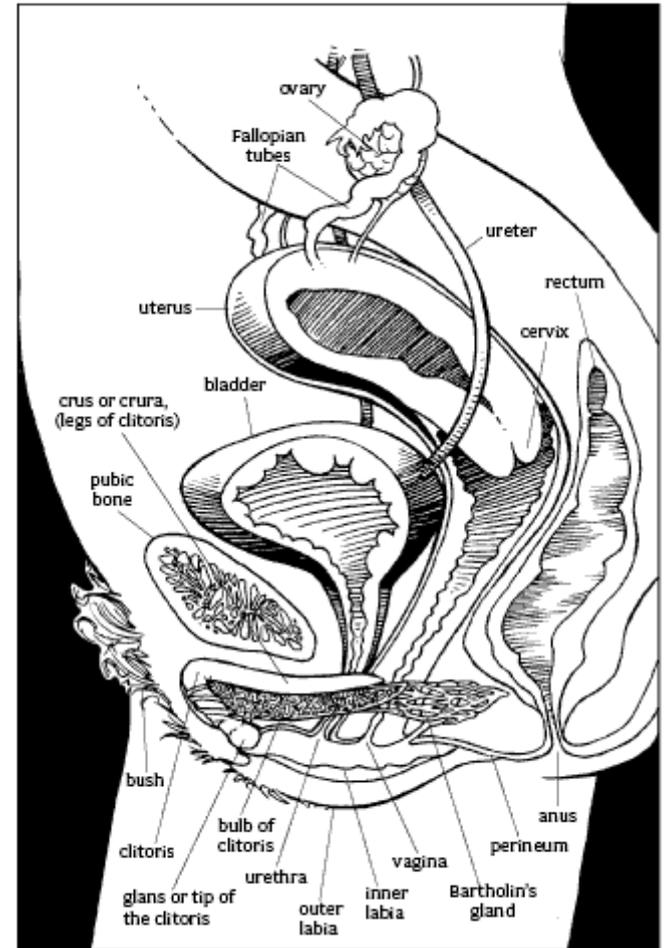
- The need for intimacy and affection is lifelong and helps us define our identity.
- 48% sexually active, at least 1x month
- 39% satisfied with frequency of sex
- 39% would like more sex
- Only 4% want less frequent sex
- Men were more than twice as likely as women to report wanting more sex (56% of men vs. 25% of women)

Common Issues Older Adults Face

Female Sexual Responses

Changes at Mid & Later Life

- Sensitivity of clitoris may increase or decrease.
- Vaginal lubrication takes longer.
- Breast and nipple sensitivity may change.
- More time and stimulation is required for arousal and orgasm. Elasticity of pelvic floor muscles diminishes.
- Uterine contractions that are part of orgasm can become uncomfortable or painful.



Sources:

"Betty Dodson with Carlin Ross" website, www.dodsonandross.com

Joannides, P.(2008). *The Guide to Getting In On*. Walport, OR: Goofy Foot Press

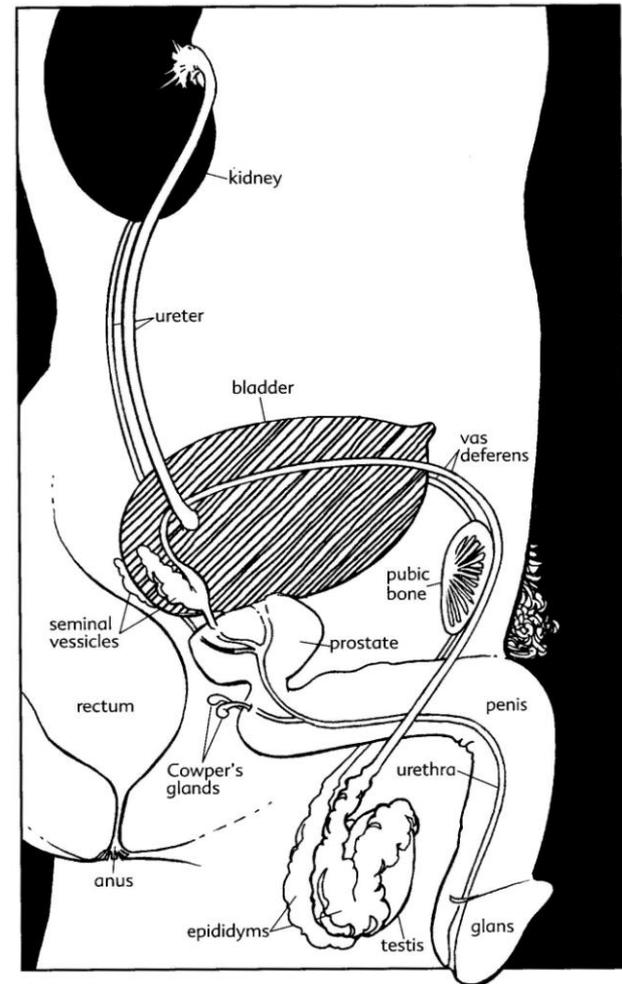
Key facts about women

- Most changes are due to a decline in hormones.
- Symptoms of menopause can impede sexual desire and function.
- Vaginal lining thins, can be easily irritated.
- Freedom from pregnancy worry may lower inhibitions.
- Lack of education may cause guilt, shame
- Losses can cause lessened sexual desire and response.
- Labia atrophy
- Vagina shorten, cervix lower in vagina
- Loss of fat in mons pubis

Male Sexual Responses

Changes at Mid & Later Life

- Erections not as firm
- **Erectile problems**
- Experience of orgasm may feel different
- **Lubrication decreases or disappears**
- Semen volume decreases
- **Refractory period longer**
- Fertility extends well into later life



Sources:

- Butler, R.N. & Lewis, M.I. (2002). *The New Love and Sex after 60*. New York, Ballantine Books
- Joannides, P.(2008). *The Guide to Getting In On*. Walport, OR: Goofy Foot Press
- McCarthy, B. & McCarthy, M. *Rekindling Desire*. New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- Zilbergeld, B. (2000). *The New Male Sexuality*. New York: Bantam.

The many dimensions of sexual problems

Adapted from a presentation by Marty Klein & Jack Morin at the New View of Women's Sexual Problems Conference, Montreal, March 30, 2005

Sexual problems due to...

...physiological factors

- Medical conditions
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Side effects of drugs, medications, or medical treatments
- Overuse or dependence on prescription drugs, alcohol, or other recreational drugs

...psychological factors

- Negative beliefs about one's self-worth or desirability
- Inability to accept changes/limitations due to aging
- Perceived lack of choice in one's sexual behaviors or attitudes
- Sexual avoidance due to possible negative consequences

Sexual problems due to...

... partner and relationship factors

- Abuse, betrayal, dislike, fear
- Differences in partner preferences for frequency or types of sexual behaviors
- Poor communication

...societal Factors

- Inadequate sex education or lack of access to health services
- Cultural standards of “ideal” sexuality that are difficult to reach
- Lack of interest, fatigue, or lack of time due to family, work, or other obligations

What is “Good-Enough” Sex?

* Adapted from Michael E. Metz & Barry W. McCarthy

- **INTIMACY**
- **PLEASURE**
- **MUTUAL EMOTIONAL
ACCEPTANCE**
- **PLAYFULNESS**



Treatment

- Sex therapy, psychotherapy
- Vacuum devices, implants, injections, medications
- Artificial lubrication
- Education

Thinking about sexuality in long- term care

Being sensitive & sensible about sexual expression

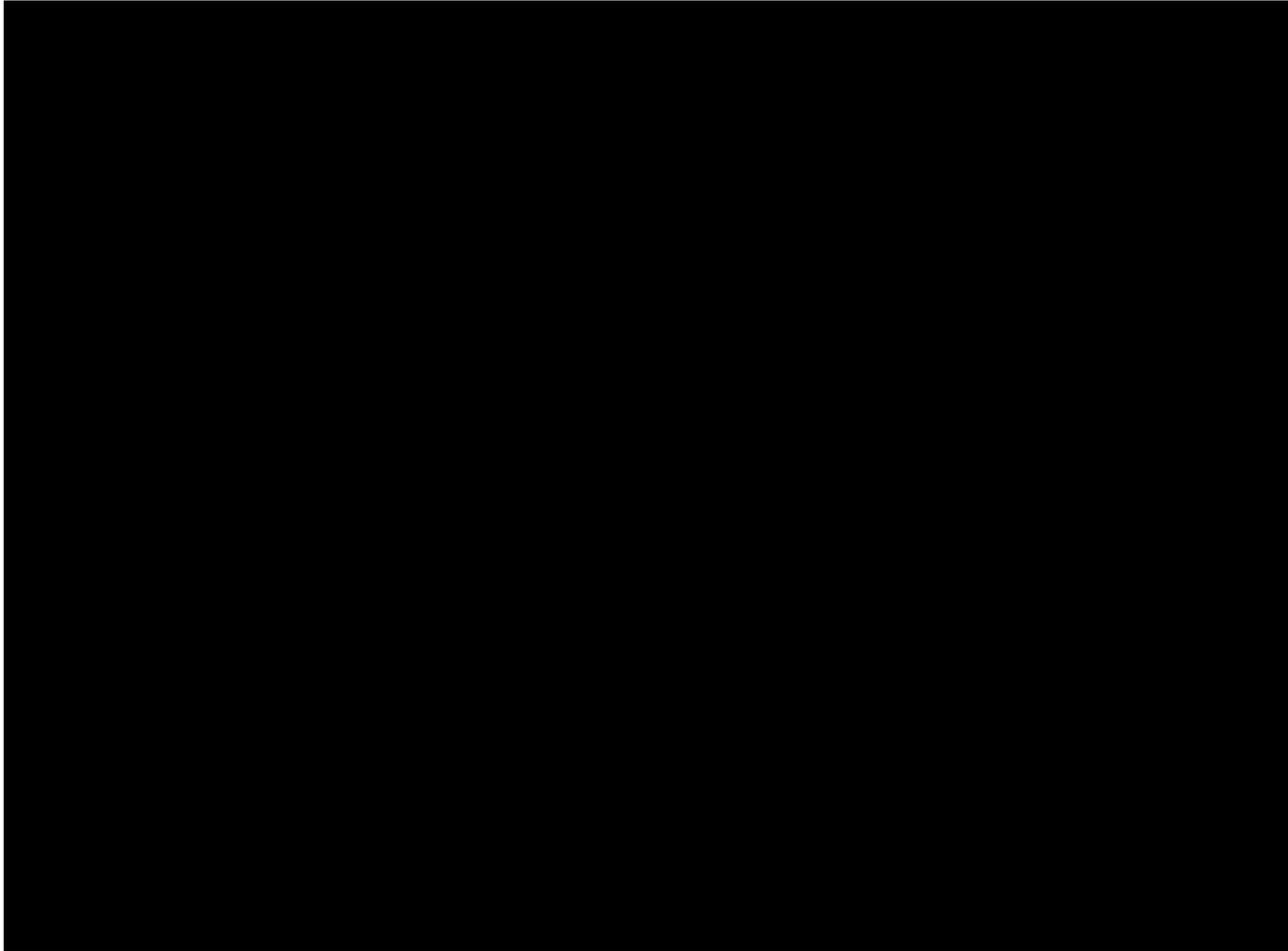
Sunnyside Nursing Home

This story, written by Anne Terrell, M.S.W., is based on an actual nursing home situation.

Sunnyside Nursing Home Characters

- Sarah
- Jack
- Charge Nurse
- Night Nurse
- Social Director
- Jessie
- Maintenance Man
- Psych Nurse
- Daughter
- Director

Freedom of Sexual Expression



Sexual rights at a home for older adults

Based on the policies of the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale, New York

Policy #1

- Our residents have the right to seek out and engage in sexual expression.

Policy #2

- Sexual expression may be between or among residents, or may include visitors. Acts involving minors, those that are not consensual, and acts between people who are cognitively impaired are not allowed. Sexual expression may not impact negatively on the resident community as a whole through public display. Any act that might transmit a sexually transmitted infection is prohibited.

Policy #3

- Residents have the right to access and/or obtain, for private use, materials with legal but sexually explicit content: books, magazines, film, videos, pictures, or drawings.

Policy #4

- To the extent possible, residents have the right of access to facilities, most notably private space, in support of sexual expression.

Thinking about a resident's competence

Adapted, with permission, from Peter A. Lichtenberg in (2008). *Assessment of Older Adults with Diminished Capacity*. Washington, DC: American Bar Association/American Psychology Association

Informed Consent

1. Voluntary participation
2. Mental competence
3. Awareness of risks and benefits

Guidelines and Questions to Ask:

1. Resident's awareness of relationship
2. Resident's ability to avoid exploitation
3. Resident's awareness of potential risks

What's Next?

After today's session, think about what you or your organization can do to support healthy older adult sexuality. Set a goal for action to be accomplished in:

- 7 Days
- 7 Weeks
- 7 Months

Resources



- Consortium on Sexuality and Aging (www.sexualityandaging.com)
- National Institute on Aging (<http://www.nia.nih.gov/>)
- American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (www.AASECT.org)
- Older, Wiser, Sexually Smarter Curriculum (<http://www.sexedstore.com>)

Thank you.

Amber Brown, Education & Training Manager
abrown@planitpa.org

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