# Navigating Menopause and Sex

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## Maintaining Intimacy Through Perimenopause and Beyond

It's well documented that many women find it hard to maintain intimacy with their partner if they are feeling stressed, depressed, unconfident or unhappy with their appearance.

Given all the changes — both physical and psychological — it's unsurprising that the onset of perimenopause can create issues, which, if not tackled, can lead to a growing chasm in important relationship.

It's a sad fact that most divorces are initiated when couples are in their 40s, 50s or 60s — the menopause years. Lack of sex is often cited as one of the reasons for mid-life divorce.

Women hit by uninvited and unavoidable hormonal upheaval surely should be forgiven as they deal with hot flashes, memory problems, menopause anger, migraine, night sweats, vaginal dryness, itchy skin, and irregular periods (which always seem to strike at the most inconvenient time). But being part of a couple means sharing good times and bad.

It can be dangerous to wallow while your partner becomes more distant as intimacy takes a back seat.

### Dealing With Life Changes

Perimenopause often coincides with major life changes, like empty nest syndrome and downscaling the family home, which can leave some women feeling insecure and unsure in their role.

There may be unwelcome changes to the body — waists often thicken, there may be breast pain in menopause and breasts may start to sag, skin and intimate areas may dry out. It's a time when wrinkles start to deepen and sliver highlights appear.

Some women rejoice in their new lease of life, and some women even find their libido increases. But what if you feel unsexy, uninterested and, frankly, not in the mood?

Is there any way of beating menopause and restoring the passion in the bedroom?

### Reigniting the Flame

Firstly, it's important to identify why it is you feel more like a nice cup of tea than a romp between the sheets. If you just battle on, gritting your teeth whilst thinking about the grocery list rather than losing yourself in the moment, your relationship could be tainted by resentfulness, anxiety and even fear if sex has become painful or uncomfortable.

If there is pain or discomfort, contact your doctor. It could be something minor such as vaginal dryness or a

prolapse, which can be sorted with medication or in severe situations, surgery.

It might be that nerves are playing a part. Yes, you might have been with your partner for decades, but feeling embarrassed or unhappy about your changing physical appearance can lead to lack of confidence in your love life.

And if your sex-drive has gone walkabout, just one bad experience can lead to a pattern of unsuccessful or unsatisfactory intimacy. This can leave you upset and less than keen to repeat the exercise, and your partner possibly hurt and bewildered.

**Communication**

The key to this problem is communication. Talk to your partner — explain your physical issues and how it affects you emotionally. Reassure them that it's not diminishing love and attraction causing your lack of interest in sex.

Go back to basics. Cuddle as you watch TV. Hold hands as you walk. Share a bath or a massage and if it helps, make a deal that such activities should not lead to full sex.

Set boundaries; without the pressure to perform or the risk of possibly painful penetration you might be able to enjoy a happy ending in more imaginative ways.

**Get Romantic**

If you are blushing right now — don't. Luckily we are a generation that has grown up knowing (I hope!) that enjoying intimacy does not make you a bad person and exploring ways of making it more satisfying is really OK.

If you are lucky, you might have friends you can ask for ideas to refresh your romantic routine. Or you can just pick up magazines or search online for tips.

I'm not talking porn here. Maybe you can research massage techniques in a women's lifestyle magazine and pick up some nice scented oil along with your groceries. Maybe a bit of cheeky role-play might help.

Revisit the early days of your romance. Instead of a short Saturday night knee-trembler in the dark under the covers after the news, go out on a date.

Dress up. Have dinner together. Make something special at home or even go out.

Maybe have a glass or two of wine to help you relax. Just don't get completely drunk, as your evening is more likely to end up with you dizzy and vomiting than seeing fireworks.

**Pamper Yourself**

If fixing your hair, trying a new color, buying new sexy but flattering nightclothes, getting your nails done or buying some new makeup will give you a spring in your step — do it. You don't have to spend lots to enjoy a treat.

Giving yourself some me-time might help reduce stress and anxiety, which could be affecting your love life. Allow yourself some regular time to read a book or have a bubble bath.

Taking up exercise could help with self-esteem and other symptoms too. Build a regular walk into your routine as a couple. You'll keep fit together and have chance to talk.

If relationship issues run deeper and you are struggling to overcome how you feel about menopause and how your partner is dealing with your issues, seek counseling.

Your healthcare provider should be able to recommend someone you can meet face-to-face or speak to online or

over the phone. It might seem like hard work or embarrassing to admit you have problems or aren’t coping, but better to tackle it all now before you become another depressing divorce statistic.