

## Sexuality and Intimacy

Our emotions impact every aspect of life, including intimacy and sexual experiences. Maintaining open communication about feelings and emotions is important. Many couples do not openly talk about sex and intimacy, relying on predictable, non-verbal patterns of sexual expression (such as through a look or touch). Parkinson's may result in physical or emotional changes that can change these established patterns. Erectile dysfunction and/or difficulty achieving orgasm are sometimes reported by those living with PD.

### Promoting and Renewing Sexuality and Intimacy

- Parkinson's may cause changes in facial expression that may be interpreted by your partner as lack of interest. Communicate your needs and listen openly to your partner's needs.
- Changes in mood such as depression or anxiety may result in decreased libido and desire. Seek counseling or medications to treat these common symptoms of PD.
- For some, the symptoms of Parkinson's, such as fatigue or stiffness, may make the sexual act different or more difficult. Be creative; try new positions or roles
- Find things you enjoy doing together. Remind one another what you love and appreciate about the other. Remember that true intimacy is related to comfortable, open communication, and is not always related to a physical relationship.
- Intimacy involves mutual respect for each other's spirit and autonomy. Sit together in a relaxing and non-demanding way- cuddle.
- Use touch in affirming ways that are not reliant on sexual performance. Hold hands, hug, or offer massage as an expression of love and intimacy.
- Be patient- remember the goal in sexual intimacy is mutual enjoyment and pleasure. Emphasize comfort and pleasure, not performance.



### Involving Your Team:

- Talk with your doctor, counselor, or social worker about feelings of depression, concerns regarding changes in sexual performance, or difficulties with current relationships. Medication, and/or a recommendation for counseling may be advised.
- An occupational therapist may be helpful in offering practical strategies regarding bed mobility.

*Struthers Parkinson Center, Parkinson's FOCUS: Finding Options for Care, Understanding, and support*

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