LOVE, INTIMACY, AND SEXUALITY IN OLD AGE

CHAPTER 7
MYTHS AND REALITY ABOUT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

- **Myth**
  - Age-related physiological changes detrimentally affect sexual functioning

- **Studies have found**
  - Older people who remain sexually active do not differ significantly in the frequency in sexual relations compared to their younger selves.
MYTHS AND REALITY ABOUT SEXUAL ACTIVITY

- Studies have found
  - When a partner is available, the rate of sexual behavior is fairly stable across the life course.
  - Even older people with chronic health problems, depression and cognitive dysfunction can achieve sexual satisfaction.
  - Relationships are more important than sexual activity.
WOMEN AND AGE-RELATED PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

- Three phases of climacteric
  - Perimenopause
    - unpredictable menstrual cycles
    - up to ten years before menopause
  - Menopause
    - cessation of the menstrual cycle
  - Postmenopause
    - when 12 months have passed without a menstrual cycle
WOMEN AND AGE-RELATED PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

- Menopause
  - Many non-western cultures view menopause as a time of respect and status for women.
  - In the U.S. the view is that women are expected to have difficulty at this period of life.
  - Many women view menopause as a potentially positive transition.
MEN AND AGE-RELATED PHYSIOLOGICAL CHANGES

• Male Menopause - “Viropause”
  • a term that suggests a significant change experienced by men as their production of testosterone decreases in later life
  • although male fertility is maintained, some men experience both psychological and physiological changes
Erectile dysfunction is the chief cause of men withdrawing from sexual activity.
  • It is common, treatable, and under-diagnosed.

New treatments have been made widely available.
CHRONIC DISEASES AND SEXUAL ACTIVITY

- Chronic illness can affect sexual activity:
  - effects on mediating physiological mechanisms
  - chronic pain
  - complications from medication
  - negative effects on well-being/self-perceptions
  - distraction of illness may deplete energy needed for sexual interest and responsiveness
GAY, LESBIAN, BISEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER (GBLT) PARTNERS IN OLD AGE

• There is a consistent pattern of relatively high life satisfaction with being gay, good adjustment to old age, and ongoing sexual interest and activity.

• Older gay individuals who define the meaning of homosexuality in terms of positive self-identity have been found to have the least psychosomatic complaints.
PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT LATE-LIFE
AFFECTION, LOVE, AND INTIMACY

- Past history of sexual activity and availability of a partner
- Negative attitudes toward sexual activities
- Reaction to physiological changes
- Responses to the attitudes of others & society
- Societal misconceptions regarding sexuality in later life
- Living arrangements
PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS THAT AFFECT LATE-LIFE AFFECTION, LOVE, AND INTIMACY

• Widow(er)’s Syndrome
  • a term coined by Masters and Johnson
  • describes sexual dysfunction following a long period of abstinence due to a spouse’s illness and/or death
Facilitating Older Adults’ Sexual Functioning

- Treatment plans should address
  - Issues relative to the past, present, and potential sources of intimacy
  - The meaning of past intimacies
  - Grief work over losses of intimacy
  - Permission to explore and repair intimate relationships
AGING IS NOT FOR SISSIES