

FACT SHEET



Physical Changes After Brain Injury Sexual Changes

QUICK FACTS

- Changes in sexual function are common following a brain injury and may include:
 - Reduced or heightened libido
 - Changes in the ability to become sexually aroused
 - Changes in physical ability (i.e. erectile dysfunction, inability to orgasm)

WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE?

- Person no longer engages in sexual intimacy or intercourse
- Intimacy and sexual intercourse “feel like it is with a stranger”
- A person may become hypersexualized (refer to Disinhibition And Inappropriate Behavior)

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE CAUSES AND COMPLICATIONS?

Possible causes:

- Injury to the brain can impact motivation, initiation, mood and influence emotions related to depression, anxiety and stress
- Certain medications can result in reduced libido.
- Associated injuries physical injuries can also impede an individual's sexual functioning
- Decreased self-esteem due to a loss of physical abilities can result in an individual being less likely to engage in sexual activities.
- Co-occurring illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease can reduce libido.
- Increased fatigue

Possible complications:

- Changes in intimate relationships
- Reduced self-esteem
- If the individual is displaying hypersexuality, there is an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy as a result of unsafe practices

WHAT CAN WE DO?

- Recognize and accept that the individual may have this difficulty
- Create open communication between you and your partner and discuss your expectations, fears and feelings.
- Work with a sexual health or relationship counsellor
- Use energy preservation strategies such as engaging in sexual intercourse in the morning when their energy is at the highest
- Find new ways to engage with each other (e.g. relearning who each other are, what interests they have, and new activities you both enjoy doing together)
- Do not take it personally, recognize that the problem is due to a brain injury
- Exercise sexual precautions, discuss with your doctor contraceptive methods and safe sex practices
- Consult a doctor for information on medications that impact libido
- Access mental health resources to address feelings of depression, stress and anxiety

Disclaimer: This information is not meant to replace advice from a medical doctor. Consult a health care provider regarding specific medical concerns or treatment.