Maintaining Intimacy with MS

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Don't Let MS Take Over Your Relationship

Eric Patterson is a licensed professional counsellor. Read our article on MS and Sex: Embracing Love and Your Body for the perspective of an MS patient.

Whenever you investigate potential barriers to having good relationships, you look to the normal sources. You look at trust. You look at communication. You weigh how these key points in a relationship can enhance what you have into something better, or diminish what you have into something desirable to no one.

Then, there is the combination of sex and intimacy. Overly relying on these two is never a good idea, but if they are absent, the resulting demise of your relationship can be harsh. Sex and intimacy can make people feel connected and united in ways that no other aspect can. Sexual tension, frustration caused by lack of intimacy, and undesirable sexual experiences can tear relationships apart to an irreversible point.

The Impact of MS

Multiple sclerosis shapes every aspect of your life in largely negative ways. Your romantic relationships are no exception. Sure, there is the occasional story of a relationship that has found battling MS a source of strength and a bond of togetherness. Others find the hardship to be a heavy weight that hinders their ability to have sex and feel intimacy with their partner.

Experts believe that MS negatively influences sex and intimacy in three distinct ways. The primary way is from the direct, biological changes triggered by MS. Some people will have brain lesions that target specific areas associated with sex and sexuality. For men, MS can make achieving an erection, maintaining an erection, or having an orgasm impossible. For women, MS can make sex less comfortable through decreased lubrication and less pleasurable by reducing or eliminating the odds of an orgasm.

The second way that MS makes sex and intimacy more difficult is through indirect, biological changes. These changes are related to MS directly but to sexuality and intimacy indirectly. Think about the range of MS symptoms you have and inspect the ones that might negatively affect your relationship.

For example, if energy and motivation are a struggle due to MS, sex will be a lower priority. Additionally, if physical pain is a problem, sex will not be a pleasurable endeavor. These secondary impacts yield huge results.

The third way that MS disrupts your sex life and intimacy is by changing the way you view yourself. The changed viewpoints occur on many levels. After the MS diagnosis, you may see yourself as someone who is sick, ill, sad, unlovable, and many other unwelcome adjectives.

This new perspective can bring about feelings of depression and anxiety, which will distort views on your relationship. If you are feeling less desirable and your relationship is less desirable, sex and intimacy will be less

likely.

Next page: identifying negative influences and reducing their impact.

Negative Influences

Reducing the impact of MS may be challenging, but if you work to target the negative influences individually, you may arrive at one or several remedies that repair the damage.

Primary Source

Those issues caused by direct, biological factors of MS must be addressed in direct ways. Luckily, there are solutions that focus on improving the sexual functioning for men. Oral medications are available to aid issues related to gaining an erection. Women are not as fortunate since options are not as effective or straightforward. Making the process more comfortable with changed positions or lubrication can help, though.

Secondary Source

The indirect, biological impact of MS can leave a wide range of symptoms. To limit these symptoms, begin by having a conversation with your treatment team about better ways to manage your symptoms. If these can be controlled, the influence on sexuality will be reduced. From there, discuss the potential side effects of the medications you are prescribed. Certain medications like antidepressants are known to decrease interest in sex and even cause levels of sexual dysfunction.

Tertiary Source

The third-level issues are the ones that are well within your control. Rather than needing others to make the change for you, you can facilitate the change. This helps since so much of MS is losing control.

Reducing the Impact of MS on Sex and Intimacy

One of the most important steps to improve sex and intimacy in your relationship is to separate the two. Yes, sex and intimacy commonly occur together, but they do not have to appear together exclusively. You can have sex without intimacy and intimacy without sex.

If MS makes sex difficult or impossible, invest more time and energy towards intimacy. Intimacy without sex can be a highly rewarding situation. It will help you reconnect with your partner, reduce tension in your life, and maybe inspire renewed interest in sex. It may seem that separating sex and intimacy means twice the work, but think of it as doubling your chance for success.

A great way to boost the intimacy is through improved communication with your partner. Communication is a powerful force in relationships. When relationships are struggling, communication suffers because the needs, wants, and perceptions of you and your partner are differing to a high degree. Building communication is never an easy process, but the benefits will improve intimacy and satisfaction in the relationship.

Improving communication takes practice because bad habits may have developed since your diagnosis. The key will be consistency. Set aside 30 minutes of distraction-free time every day to speak to each other. Focus on feelings and ways to improve the relationship status rather than rehashing the past. Rehashing seems to only reinforce the negative aspects of life and the relationship. You cannot be interested in placing blame, only finding solutions.

During your daily conversations, get back into good habits. Make good eye contact, put down your phone, practice good listening skills, and rediscover the benefits of physical touch. Holding hands, hugging, kissing, and touching their check may not seem significant, but doing so can improve the accomplishments of the

conversation. You may not feel like having any physical contact at first, and that’s okay. The discomfort will pass as you progress down the path of renewed connection and intimacy.

Conclusion

MS has a way of distorting and stealing so many parts of your life. If MS has changed your sex life and intimacy, get it back. Pay attention to the primary, secondary, and tertiary ways it changes you and your relationship. From there, fight back against each one with your treatment team to find the available options. If you work together, things can get better.