



Can diabetes affect my sex life?

Q: My best friend just confided that her husband has erectile dysfunction as a result of his type 2 diabetes. I was recently diagnosed with type 2 diabetes myself, and now I'm wondering: Can it affect female sexual function too?

A: I'm so glad you asked! Most women aren't talking about this: A study in *Diabetes Care* found that only 19% of women with type 2 diabetes bring up the topic with their doctor. However, both men and women with diabetes are at risk of the condition affecting their sexual health. In fact, vaginal dryness is twice as common in women with diabetes as it is in women without diabetes. And according to a study in the journal *Obstetrics & Gynecology*, middle-aged women whose diabetes requires insulin are 80% more likely to report trouble reaching orgasm than women without diabetes, likely because of decreased blood flow to the genitals or nerve damage to the clitoris that diabetes can cause.

The good news is that keeping your blood sugar in the normal range, by incorporating 30-minute walks into your daily routine, eating a diet plentiful in fruits, vegetables and whole grains and checking your blood-glucose levels regularly, can prevent sexual health problems. These strategies help ward off the blood-vessel and nerve damage that can cause diabetes-triggered sexual dysfunction. Indeed, one study of women with type 2 diabetes found that those who followed a Mediterranean diet had the lowest prevalence of sexual dysfunction.

These simple steps should ward off problems, but if you start to experience symptoms like vaginal dryness or trouble reaching orgasm, your healthcare provider can offer strategies to help combat them.



Q

Lately I've had a metallic taste in my mouth and my tongue feels like it's on fire! I'm 51. Can you get hot flashes in your mouth?

A

This sounds like *burning mouth syndrome*, a condition that affects up to 33% of postmenopausal women but can also occur during perimenopause. For many, declining estrogen is the culprit, triggering a drop in saliva production that can cause the burning sensation and metallic taste you describe. If that's the case, your doctor can prescribe estrogen therapy that's delivered orally or via patch, spray or gel to boost saliva production and tame your symptoms.

But a vitamin B-12 deficiency, which is common among women over 45, can also cause burning mouth syndrome. Supplementing with 2,500 mcg. of liquid B-12 (like Global Healing B12 Tri-Blend, Amazon.com) and eating yogurt, which is rich in B vitamins, can help restore levels.

Why did my period suddenly return?

Q: I'm 53 and haven't had a period in over 15 months—so I thought I was postmenopausal. But after getting my COVID vaccine, my periods have started up again. Should I be worried?

A: Probably not. Although I usually advise women to see their doctor if they experience any bleeding once they're postmenopausal (meaning that they've gone 12 consecutive months without a period), many women have reported irregular bleeding after getting their COVID vaccine. In fact, the National Institutes of Health is funding new studies that will hopefully give us answers since researchers don't yet understand the exact connection between the vaccine and breakthrough bleeding. Some studies even suggest the problem could be tied to ongoing pandemic stress.

But since we have no way of knowing for sure yet if the vaccine is causing bleeding, I suggest making an appointment to see your doctor so she can rule out other causes.



Put FIRST to work for you!

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