PLEASURE *for* LIFE

How Desire, Arousal Can Change and Thrive With Age

BY SUSAN BRATTON



Sex can get better with age. By "sex," I mean orgasmic intimacy, not just intercourse. Pleasure, connection and sexual response can remain meaningful throughout life, even as bodies, hormones and health needs change.

I encourage people to approach sexuality with a growth mindset. Good sex is not something you either have or lose forever. It is something you can keep learning about, adapting and nurturing.

That does not mean every sexual change is easy to reverse or that one routine works for everyone. But aging does not automatically mean giving up on desire, arousal or pleasure.

Pleasure Can Support Well-Being

Orgasm is a whole-body event. During sexual arousal and climax, the nervous system, brain, muscles and cardiovascular system all become involved. Hormones and neurotransmitters such as oxytocin and endorphins are also part of the experience.

That is one reason sexual pleasure can feel relaxing, connecting and restorative. Some people notice better sleep, a lighter mood or temporary pain relief after orgasm.

Sexual activity can also involve movement, flexibility and muscular engagement, while orgasm often includes rhythmic pelvic-floor contractions.

The bigger point is simple: pleasure can be part of a healthy life. It should not be treated as frivolous or as something people are expected to outgrow.

Sexual Response Can Change With Age

Aging can affect sexual function in many ways. Hormonal changes, circulation, medications, stress, sleep, chronic illness and relationship factors may all influence libido and arousal.

For some people, vaginal dryness, discomfort, erectile changes or reduced sensitivity become more noticeable. Others find that arousal simply takes longer than it used to.

That does not mean your sex life is over.

Arousal depends heavily on blood flow, stimulation and time. Many people benefit from slowing down, increasing the amount of warm-up and paying more attention to the kinds of touch that feel best now rather than relying on what worked years ago. Pleasure is a skill in the sense that curiosity, communication and practice can help you better understand your changing body.

Hormones and Blood Flow

Hormones play an important role in sexual health. Estrogen, progesterone, testosterone and other hormones can affect

vaginal tissue, erections, desire, sleep, mood and energy.

For people experiencing menopause-related vaginal dryness or discomfort, localized vaginal estrogen is one treatment a health care professional may recommend. Other hormone therapies may also be appropriate for some people, but they are medical treatments that should be discussed with a qualified clinician based on individual risks and needs.

Blood flow also matters because genital arousal depends on vascular response. Lifestyle habits that support cardiovascular health, including exercise, nutritious foods, adequate sleep and management of conditions such as high blood pressure or diabetes, can also support sexual function.

Products Can Play a Role

You do not necessarily need an expensive treatment to explore better sexual function.

For people with vulvas, lubricants, moisturizers, vibrators and other pleasure products can make stimulation more comfortable and help users experiment with different sensations. Some people may also find pelvic-floor therapy helpful, particularly if pain, tightness or weakness is affecting sexual function.

For people with penises, vacuum erection devices can help draw blood into the penis and are commonly used for erectile dysfunction or rehabilitation in certain medical situations. Erection rings can help some users maintain firmness, but they should be used according to product instructions and not worn longer than recommended.

Prescription medications such as tadalafil may help with erectile dysfunction, but these should be used under medical guidance.

Some clinics also market treatments such as laser therapy, shockwave therapy, platelet-rich plasma injections and other regenerative procedures for sexual concerns. Consumers should approach these options carefully.

Evidence varies by treatment and condition, and some therapies remain experimental or have limited high-quality data supporting broad claims about improved orgasm, sensation, tissue growth or sexual "rejuvenation."

Ask what the treatment is approved for, what evidence supports it, what risks are involved and whether there are more established options to try first.

Be Skeptical of Dramatic Promises

Sexual wellness is full of products and procedures that promise to reverse aging, restore tissue, increase sensitivity or dramatically improve orgasms. Some may have legitimate uses. Others are marketed far beyond what research currently supports.

That is especially important when claims involve stem cells, exosomes, platelet-rich plasma, genital lasers, supplements or devices marketed as regenerative therapies.

A persuasive testimonial is not the same thing as clinical evidence.

The same caution applies to supplements marketed for nitric oxide, libido or sexual performance. Some ingredients may have evidence behind them, but effectiveness, dose, product quality and safety can vary widely.

If you take prescription medications or have cardiovascular, hormonal or other health concerns, talk with a clinician before adding supplements or sexual-performance products.

A Better Sex Life Is Not Only About the Body

Physical function is important, but technique and communication matter too.

Being a good lover is learnable. Paying attention to a partner's responses, asking what feels good, sharing preferences and trying new kinds of touch can keep intimacy interesting even as bodies change.

Solo exploration can help too. Masturbation can give you information about pressure, rhythm, speed, fantasy and stimulation preferences without the added pressure of performing for someone else.

Pleasure does not have to look exactly the way it did when you were younger.

It may become slower, more intentional, more creative or more dependent on communication. That does not make it less satisfying.

A Fresh Approach to Sexual Aging

You do not have to accept the idea that getting older means becoming less sexual.

You may need more time, different stimulation, more lubrication, medical support or new tools. You may also need to let go of old expectations and learn what works for your body now.

Sexual health is connected to the rest of your health, but it is also its own meaningful part of well-being.

If you experience sudden loss of desire, persistent pain, erectile changes, bleeding, numbness or other distressing symptoms, talk with a qualified health care professional.

Your body may change with age. Your capacity for curiosity, connection and pleasure does not have to disappear with it. ■



Susan Bratton, "Intimacy Expert to Millions," has published 44 books and programs focused on lovemaking techniques, bedroom communication and intimate wellness, including "The Pumping Guide," "Thrust in Time" and "Hot to Trot: 28 Fascinating Facts That Supercharge Your Sex Drive." Learn more at BetterLover.com and find her product recommendations at DriveDesire.com.