

Sex, intimacy and relationships after stroke

What you need to know

- › Stroke can change how your body feels and works. It can change how you feel about yourself and your relationships.
- › Things may be different since your stroke, but there are things that can help. It can take time to find what works for you. You may need to try new ways of doing things.
- › It's normal to have questions about sex. Talk with your doctor or health professional. They can give you advice and support.
- › Research shows sex does not increase your risk of having another stroke.

Sex after a stroke

Your body

How you move and feel touch may be different. You may also have:

- › Muscle weakness, tightness or pain.
- › Incontinence – you can't control your bladder or bowel.
- › Trouble communicating.
- › Fatigue – you feel tired and lack energy.

Stroke can also change how your body works. You may have:

- › More or less interest in sex.
- › Trouble getting or keeping an erection.
- › Vaginal dryness.
- › Trouble having an orgasm.
- › Pain during sex.

Your emotions

How you feel about yourself and your sexuality may be different. It's common to feel sad, worried, irritable and frustrated after a stroke.

You may be less confident after a stroke. If you're single, you may worry about dating and having sex with someone new.

If you have a partner, changes in roles and responsibilities can change your sexual relationship. You may worry about how your partner sees you sexually. They may worry sex will cause you discomfort or pain.

Is it safe?

Research shows sex does not increase your risk of having another stroke. If you or your partner worry about this, talk with your doctor.

Whether you are single or partnered, it's important to know what a **healthy relationship** is. Consent means that you and your partner give a clear 'yes' to sex. Everyone has a right to feel safe and respected. 1800 RESPECT can give you information and advice.

What helps

Things may be different, but you can still be intimate, masturbate and have sex.

Get started

For some people, getting back to masturbation and sex early on is important. For others, it may take more time.

You can ask for privacy when you are in hospital. Spend time relaxing together, talking and touching. Once you get home, make time for sex and intimacy when you're ready.

It can take time to find what works for you. Start with easier activities. You can explore as you get more confident.

Ask for advice

Talking about sex can be embarrassing. It's normal to have questions about sex, contraception and fertility. Talk with your doctor or health professional, it's part of their job.

You can also call StrokeLine. StrokeLine's nursing and allied health professionals can answer your questions. They can give you advice and support.

Your body

You may need to try new ways of doing things.

It can be helpful to explore what feels good on your own first. You may want to see if sex toys help.

There may be times of day or week that work best. It helps if you:

- › Are well rested and relaxed.
- › Have enough energy.
- › Have enough time.

You may need advice to find new positions and ways of doing things. Occupational therapists and physiotherapists can provide advice and pictures for different positions.

If you have **incontinence**, it can help to:

- › Go to the toilet before sex.
- › Try different positions.
- › Use bed protection.
- › Have sex in a bath or shower.

A continence nurse can give you advice. Ask your GP for a referral or contact the National Continence Helpline.

If you have trouble getting an erection, talk with your GP. They can let you know if erectile dysfunction medication is safe for you.

Your emotions

Talk with your partner, family and friends about your stroke and your recovery. Share how you are feeling.

If you or your partner notice changes in your behaviour or personality, talk with your doctor.

If you think depression and anxiety may be an issue for you, read our [Depression and Anxiety fact sheet](#). Talk with your doctor. There are things you can do that will help. You can get treatment.

Your relationships

If you have a partner, share how you're feeling. Talk about what you're finding difficult, and what you're enjoying. Listen to each other. Be open about your needs and wishes.

Counselling with a mental health professional can help. Contact Relationships Australia for advice.

If you're single, StrokeLine can share links to online information on dating after a stroke.

If you have trouble communicating, touch and gestures can help get your point across. A speech pathologist can give you advice.

Connect with other survivors and partners

Sharing experiences and tips can help. StrokeLine can help connect you.

Get help

StrokeLine's nursing and allied health professionals provide information, advice, support and referral. StrokeLine's practical and confidential advice will help you manage your health better and live well.

Call **1800 787 653**

Email strokeline@strokefoundation.org.au

Continence Australia

Call **1800 33 00 66**

Visit continence.org.au

Relationships Australia

Call **1300 364 277**

Visit relationships.org.au

Call **1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732)**

Visit 1800respect.org.au

QLife provides anonymous LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral. They can support you on sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings and relationships.

Call **1800 184 527**

Visit qlife.org.au

EnableMe can help with your stroke recovery. Get the information you need. Connect with other survivors and families.

Visit enableme.org.au

About us

Stroke Foundation partners with the community to prevent, treat and beat stroke. We do this through raising awareness, facilitating research and supporting survivors of stroke.

Contact us

 **StrokeLine 1800 787 653**

 strokefoundation.org.au

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