# Sexuality and Disability

All people are sexual beings. Sexual expression is a normal important part of life. What is sexuality? Sexuality includes:

- Personality.
- Thoughts.
- Values.
- Feelings.

How we communicate and express ourselves in our relationships with others, as well as our sex drive and sexual activities are an expression of our sexuality.

In today's society, sex is often associated with youth and physical fitness. Society may view a person with a disability as non-sexual. Of course, this simply is not so. A person with a disability is also a sexual being. However, persons with disabilities may have to overcome:

- Uninformed attitudes.
- Their own misconceptions.
- Personal problems regarding sexuality.

Persons with disabilities should make decisions about their sexuality from a position of information and understanding.

Disability may result in many changes:

- Movement problems.
- Loss of *sensation* (feeling).
- Communication problems.
- Impaired bowel and bladder control
- Pain.
- Fatigue.
- Changes in behavior and thinking.
- Changes in sexual functioning (erection, ejaculation, lubrication, orgasm).
- Role changes.
- Change in body image.

Each of these changes may impact one's sexuality.

Conditions associated with early stages of disability may impact sexual desire including:

- Stress.
- Fatigue.
- Depression.
- Pain.
- Fear.

Prescribed medications may affect sex drive and sexual function. Of course, self- esteem (how one feels about oneself) is going to affect one's sexuality and sexual behavior.

For a person with a disability, sexual activity may be a less spur of the moment and require planning. Planning may address issues of:

- Fatigue.
- Pain.
- Bowel routines.
- Bladder routines.

Strategies may include:

- Trying different positions.
- Having a partner play a more active role.

Other forms of sexual expression may be used. This may call for experimentation and alternative methods of pleasuring. Assistive (mechanical) devices may be used.

Communication is important in all relationships. It is very important for partners to discuss their:

- Thoughts.
- Feelings.
- Needs.
- Wants.
- How they can mutually satisfy each other.

Persons with disabilities are responsible for their sexual health. Healthy behaviors include:

- Acting within one's own value system to prevent unplanned pregnancies.
- Seeking early prenatal care.
- Avoiding contracting or transmitting sexually transmitted disease.
- Avoiding sexual abuse.

Health promoting behaviors such as self-breast and testicular exam and regular check- ups are responsible ways to identify potential problems.

Sexuality is an intimate, personal area of our lives, one that may be difficult to talk about. However, if you have concerns or questions regarding sexuality issues related to a disability, please ask one of your rehabilitation professionals.

Many caregivers and groups are available to help you deal with sexuality and disability. **A disability need not make this part of your life come to an end.**

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