

Dear Dr. Myrtle,



I've experienced several changes in my body since starting through menopause, and I'm worried that my sex life will suffer. Is there anything I can do on my own to maintain my sexy self?

Yes, there is quite a bit a woman can do to maintain her sexual health and sexual vitality throughout and after menopause. To understand some of the techniques described later in this brochure, let's first go through some basic information about the process of menopause.

What is menopause?

Technically, menopause is defined as the end ("pause") of monthly bleeding or periods ("menses"). Although the cessation of menses often happens within months, the whole process of menopause can be much longer. Menopause is often accompanied by other symptoms like hot flashes, decreased spontaneous vaginal lubrication and an increased risk of thinning bones and heart disease.

The transition through menopause can last 10-15 years (biological menopause) or can happen in as little as one to two months (due to surgery or therapies that cause sudden ovarian failure). The amount of time that menopause takes can have a strong effect on the occurrence and severity of physical symptoms.

As women mature through their 40s and 50s and transition through biological menopause, ovarian function slowly ebbs, then ceases. The ovaries are responsible for producing several hormones (estrogen, progesterone, and testosterone), as well as holding, maturing and then releasing fertile eggs into the oviducts leading to the uterus.

As menopause proceeds, the estrogen produced by the ovaries becomes less and less, which eventually prevents any eggs from maturing or being released. With lower estrogen, blood flow all over the body decreases, causing drier skin, lower vaginal

lubrication, and changes in blood vessel health everywhere in the body and brain.

Some women experience gradual symptoms over decades, and the body has a longer period to adjust to the changes. However, women who have undergone surgical removal of the ovaries or chemotherapy to treat cancer often experience these symptoms *suddenly* at whatever age the surgery/therapy occurred. It's a shock to lose all that ovarian estrogen suddenly, and it takes active planning to manage such a quick physical change.

What does estrogen do?

Estrogen is a talented hormone that has many effects on the human body. Although mostly recognized for its effect on egg maturation, estrogen affects many different cells all over the body—the brain, skin, muscle, and sub-skin tissues. And besides the ovaries, estrogen is also produced in fat cells in both males and females. This means that when women lose *ovarian* estrogen production, they continue to make a maintenance level of estrogen. It also means that those of us with a little more "padding" might transition through menopause more gently than those with less.

The major functions of estrogen are:

- Priming of **sensory** organs (eyes, ears, nose, etc.)
- Production of **pheromones**,
- Maintenance of **skin elasticity** and sub-skin tissue thickness.
- Maintenance of **muscle mass**,
- Positive effects on a **blood vessel** neurotransmitter that help the vaginal lubrication process.

Estrogen "revs up" sensory organs and helps make the world seem like a fresher, brighter, zestier place. The process of making estrogen is the same process that helps make pheromones (hormones that we smell unconsciously). Both of these effects help to make the world seem a bit sexier, and help the world think that we are sexier as well.

Estrogen also helps skin stay elastic and flexible and keeps the padding under the skin thick and lush. This includes muscle and connective tissue, such that maintenance and repair of muscle occur faster and more efficiently.

When estrogen circulates through the blood stream, it supports a neurotransmitter (nitric oxide) responsible for production of vaginal and mucous membrane lubrication. When estrogen ebbs, vaginal lubrication also ebbs, because estrogen isn't there to assist its production.

But wait just a minute! I'm losing most of that estrogen you're talking about! What's going to happen to me?

Menopause is a completely natural and safe process of a woman's life cycle. It isn't healthy for your body to be "pushed into youth" by estrogen for *all* of your life. Studies have clearly demonstrated that estrogen can be too much of a good thing and can prompt your cells to live forever. This is not good, since cell immortality is another way to describe some types of cancer (such as breast and uterine). Your body will be far healthier when it can gracefully transition through its *natural* phases, rather than being pushed too hard with a constant supply of estrogen.

Also, not everything that happens during menopause happens because of the loss of estrogen. Other lifestyle changes often overlap with menopause and can have detrimental effects on your sexual health.

SELF-CARE CAN BE VERY REWARDING

Our bodies and minds need conscious attention to function with ease and health as we get older. We also need to develop mental habits that will help us adapt and change along with our physical changes. You don't need estrogen to maintain a satisfying sexual life; there are some straightforward habits and techniques that can help you be as sexy as you want to be!

We recommend incorporating these health-supporting activities into your daily life:

Exercise is one of the keys to maintaining sexual health and pleasure as we age. Less exercise means less blood can get to sexual tissues, which means less arousal and less pleasurable sensation. Stiff vessels can't transfer as much blood, and when it comes to *sexual arousal*, blood flow is very important.

Keep your blood vessels flexible and keep your sexual arousal alive. It's easier to achieve orgasm when blood flow to the whole body is healthy. Take a walk or do some other form of aerobic exercise at a moderate pace for 30 minutes a day, every day. Take the stairs when you can (or do your armchair push-ups). Rev your engine regularly and keep the blood moving around.

Exercise lowers insulin resistance. Many people slow down physical activity in mid-life, which makes their muscles more resistant to the action of insulin. High levels of blood insulin cause blood vessels to become stiffer and lose their flexibility. Keep your blood vessels flexible to keep your sexual arousal alive.

Strength training maintains your muscle strength and mass. Consider joining a gym or finding a good class online, in person or in a book that will teach you basic strength training. Stronger muscles will help mellow the aging process, and give you a boost of self-confidence. You don't need special equipment; your own body weight will work. Try to do some strength training 2-3 times per week to keep your muscles happy.

Prepare yourself for sexual arousal sessions. Taking a 15 minute walk before sexual activity helps move the blood into your genitals and prepare them for the flow of blood that happens when you start sexual touch and play. If you find that you take a long time to warm up sexually, then try this as *the* ultimate foreplay.

Kegel exercises maintain pelvic floor strength and

flexibility. Learn where your pelvic floor is and learn how to exercise it correctly with exercise that tones and relaxes the muscles. This helps maintain your connection with the experience of sexual arousal. Tension of the pelvic floor is critical to most people's experience of "feeling turned on." When pelvic floor muscle strength starts to slip (which is accelerated by loss of estrogen), you may begin to feel as though "nothing happens down there anymore." (See the **AWT Pelvic Floor Health brochure** for instructions.).

Regularly schedule orgasms. Maintain your sexual system by giving it exercise. We recommend a minimum of one orgasm per week—really. This will help your system remember what sexual arousal is and how to do it. This will also increase blood flow to the genitals and keep your nerves functioning smoothly. No partner is required, and a vibrator can speed up the process if you wish. Orgasms are also a great way to facilitate sleep.

Follow the Vaginal Renewal Program Protocol to maintain your ability to enjoy sex with yourself or someone else. The Vaginal Renewal Program™ is a way to maintain your vaginal and vulvar skin health without, or in addition to topical estrogen. Please see the Vaginal Renewal Program brochure for all the details.

Use a good quality intimate lubricant as needed. Most women will need a bit of additional lubrication to keep sex play slippery and comfortable. We recommend having **two** different kinds of lubricant on hand; one for moisturizing and daily comfort and one for sex play. **Moisturizing** lubricants have ingredients like aloe vera, hyaluronic acid and plant cellulose. The best kind of lubricant for sex play that includes vaginal penetration or condoms is a high quality **silicone** lubricant. Look for dimethicone and dimethiconol as the ingredients.

Think sexy thoughts. Sexual feelings are a mind-body, two-way street: some of those feelings are responses to sexual changes in your body, while other feelings

are generated in your mind. Don't be afraid to "get yourself ready" to be sexual—it can transport you to where you want to go. Desire might not always occur spontaneously, especially if you are tired or stressed. Give yourself permission to call up your sexual imagination.

Hold on to your natural hormones. Stop smoking, and drink less alcohol. Tobacco has an anti-estrogenic effect that blunts sexual arousal, decreases bone strength, and stiffens blood vessels. These hurt the sexual arousal response and accelerate aging. Alcohol blunts testosterone production—so the less you drink, the friskier you'll be.

Maintain touch in your life. Oxytocin, the *I-am-loveable* hormone, increases with touch. Hug a friend, a pet, or a loved one.

Sleep. It's hard to be interested in sex when you're exhausted. Sleep at least 7-8 hours every night—you'll experience more pleasure when you're rested and awake.

Eat the AWT Good Sex Diet. We modified this anti-cancer diet so it's excellent for promoting sexual health as well. (See next fold for complete diet.)

MOST OF ALL, REMEMBER TO CARE FOR YOUR BODY, AND YOUR BODY WILL RETURN THE FAVOR.

See the following educational brochures from A Woman's Touch for more information:

- Vaginal Renewal™
- Pelvic Floor Health
- Libido
- Self-pleasuring for Women
- Tips for first time vibrator use
- Orgasms

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THE AWT GOOD SEX DIET

1. Eat 1-2 oz. of dark chocolate (70% or higher) daily.
2. Drink green tea if you are able, or Rooibos (Red) tea if you don't like green tea or want something without caffeine. Have as much as you enjoy; 2-3 cups per day recommended.
3. For protein, choose beans, chicken, turkey, only wild-caught fish (ocean fish, not whitefish), and only grass-fed beef. Eat protein at every meal to help stabilize blood sugar.
4. Eat lots of differently colored vegetables. 3-5 servings a day, including broccoli, leafy greens, carrots... Only eat yellow, blue or sweet potatoes. Eat corn only occasionally, and only fresh kernels.
5. Eat lots of fruit, especially apples and berries, 2-3 servings per day.
6. Eat at least 1 oz. of nuts per day (walnuts or almonds are good). Eat nuts as a snack when you are hungry to satisfy your hunger and stabilize your blood sugar.
7. Cook with healthy oils like canola and olive oil. Avoid trans fats completely.
8. Avoid white flour and white sugar. If you really must eat a piece of cake or have some ice cream, eat a handful of nuts along with it to balance out your blood sugar.
9. Drink lots of water. Filtered tap water is fine.
10. Use the following supplements give you maximum protection against cancer and support for your cell membranes. Your Vitamin D levels (tested by your doctor) should be at least 35ng/ml, and ideally closer to 60ng/ml, for highest immune function. Supplement your diet with the following every day:
 - Fish Oil—1000-4000 mg
 - Vitamin D3—2000-4000 IU and
 - Calcium Citrate—250-mg (no other form of calcium).
11. Don't forget the chocolate!

Still Juicy!

A PRIMER ON MAINTAINING SEXUAL HEALTH AND PLEASURE AFTER MENOPAUSE



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