

The Golden Age of Sex

Don't believe the hype about sex fading with age. Relationships and sex remain a vital part of life for many people in midlife and beyond, an AARP survey shows.

Among the findings:

- More than half (51%) of participants say they're "extremely" or "somewhat" satisfied with their sex life (52% of men, 49% of women, 63% with a regular sex partner).
- 31% expressed neutral feelings about their sexual satisfaction.
- 60% agree or strongly agree that sexual activity is a critical part of a good relationship.
- About half (49%) agree or strongly agree that sex is important to their overall quality of life.
- 84% disagree or strongly disagree that sex is only for younger people.
- Nearly one in four (24%) said they had consulted a doctor or mental health professional about a sex problem. More men than women reported this.

Most Are Sexually Active

Half of the respondents say they have sexual thoughts, fantasies, or erotic dreams at least once a week, with nearly one-fourth saying they have these thoughts at least once a day.

Participants' weekly (or more frequent) sexual activities in the past six months were listed:

- Kissing or hugging: 69%
- Sexual touching or caressing: 53%
- Intercourse: 36%
- Self-stimulation: 20%
- Oral sex: 14%

The vast majority (86%) said they had engaged in any of those activities in the last six months. Younger participants were more likely to report sexual satisfaction.

Two out of three participants were married or living with a partner or had a regular sexual partner. Most (85%) had been with their partner for at least 10 years. Four percent of the men and 1% of the women had same-sex partners.

Former Surgeon General: Sex Is Not Just for the Young

"Many believe that sexuality is the exclusive province of the young," says former U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher, MD, PhD, in a news release.

"But this AARP study makes clear that, even as we age, sexual health continues to be important to our general health," says Satcher, who is now the interim president of Morehouse School of Medicine.

The good news, he says, is that more middle-aged or older men and women are turning to health professionals to improve their sexual health. "This means, however, that health professionals must be increasingly better prepared to deal with issues related to sexual health," says Satcher.

Better Health, Better Sex Life

When asked what would improve their sex life, the No. 1 answer was better health. That ranked ahead of a better relationship, a more adventurous or younger partner, more free time, and more privacy.

Better Health, Better Sex Life continued...

Many had health problems, including 42% with high blood pressure, 35% with high cholesterol, 28% with arthritis or rheumatism, 22% with back problems, 16% with diabetes, and 10% with depression. (Each person could report more than one diagnosis.)

A lot of participants had also tried medicines, hormones, or other treatments to improve their sex lives. That included 22% of men, a substantial increase since 1999, says the study.

Among men, 31% said they were moderately or completely impotent, and 17% said they had been diagnosed with impotence, says AARP.

Baby boomers and senior citizens still need to protect themselves from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, says Satcher.

Gender, Racial Differences

"Sex is far more important to the overall quality of life of men than women," says the survey. Men who took the survey thought about and engaged in sex more often than the women. Only about 3% of men said they didn't particularly enjoy sex, compared to 15% of women.

Sexual satisfaction was reported most often by Hispanics (56%) and least often by Asians (49%). Blacks and Hispanics were more likely than whites and Asians to say that their partner was extremely satisfied with their relationship, says the study.

Additional surveys were done to ensure diversity.

Changing Practices, Traditional Views?

The survey showed an increase in people seeking information about sex, reporting sexual thoughts, and citing sex as important in a relationship, says AARP. But that doesn't mean the participants had an "anything goes" mentality.

Nearly three out of four people (73%) agreed or strongly agreed that society places too much emphasis on sex. Only 7% of those with regular sex partners said they would try or ask their partner to try sex outside of marriage with their partner's consent.

By Miranda Hitti

Courtesy: [WebMD Health News](#)