Sex Ed for Grownups: MS in Intimacy

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**MS: Bladder and Sexual Dysfunction**

- Disease affects brain and spinal cord
- Spinal cord segments are:
  - Cervical (neck)
  - Thoracic (upper back)
  - Lumbar (lower back)
  - Sacral (tailbone)
MS: Bladder and Sexual Dysfunction

• Bladder and sexual function have common neural pathways
  – Pathways from brain through spinal cord to sacral area
• Bladder and sexual dysfunction occur commonly together
• Sacral area itself rarely involved in MS
MS and the Bladder

- Bladder problems will affect a large majority of MS patients
- Symptoms and problems depend on the location of the nerve damage
- Frequency and urgency are the most common first symptoms
- Often occur within 4 years of onset
MS and the Bladder: Symptoms

- Frequency
- Urgency
- Nocturia (getting up at night to void)
- Incontinence (leaking)
- Retention (unable to empty at all)
MS and Male Sexual Dysfunction

• 70-90% of men will develop MSD within 10 years of getting MS
• Most common problem is erectile dysfunction
• Other problems involve loss of sensation, difficulty with orgasms and ejaculation
• Viagra type medications work very well
Male hormone levels and MS

- Many with or without ED will be found to have low male hormone (testosterone)
- Aggressive treatment important to prevent complications of MS
- Loss of muscle mass, weakness, poor libido, loss of bone mineral density, cognitive changes
- Difficult to differ from other diseases, such as low thyroid, or from the symptoms and treatments for MS
Female Sexual Dysfunction: Classifications

- Low desire (most common all females)
- Difficulties with arousal
- Difficulties with orgasm (most common in MS)
- Sexual pain
MS and Female Sexual Dysfunction

- 40-70% of females with MS affected
- Body image issues important
- No effective treatment to date
- Aggressive treatment of vaginal dryness
- Controversy about hormone replacement therapy in MS females
Sexual Dysfunction and MS: Common Themes

- Impact on partner
- Need alternate definition of a satisfying sexual encounter
- Mobility issues and weakness
- Adjust timing of lovemaking when energy levels are highest
- Treat depression and marital issues
Take Away Messages

• Coordinated care between neurologist, primary care doctors and specialists
• Recognize that bladder and sexual issues can be treated
• Pursue specialty care when appropriate
Sexuality and MS: Keeping Sex Spicy Through Mind Body Changes

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Agenda

• Broaden existing knowledge about....
  – Sexuality
  – Disability
    • View sexuality as an important within the context of life changes with disability

• Challenge personal views and beliefs
  – About sexuality
  – About MS

• What you can do to improve your sex life!
  – Your relationship to yourself
  – Your relationship to your partner
The Burning Questions

• Why are we having this discussion?
• Reality is….
  – Our thoughts, behavior, emotions, and beliefs about disability can affect sexual activity and intimate relationships
• How much do you care?
• Are you concerned that it is not important to you?
Topic Sensitivity

• Personal topic
  – Personal value system
    • Moral beliefs
  – Religion/Spirituality
  – Cultural beliefs

• Respect for self and your beliefs
How does MS Influence Sexual Functioning?

- Sexual arousal begins in the central nervous system and the brain sends messages to the sexual organs along the nerve pathway in the spinal cord.
- MS-related changes to these nerve pathways can directly or indirectly impair sexual functioning.
- There is a disconnect between the brain and physical sexual functioning.
Sexual Changes Associated with MS

- Decreased sex drive
- Altered genital sensations (numbness, pain, increased sensitivity)
  - When is sexual activity over?
  - Problems having an orgasm for both men and women
- Ejaculation difficulty
- Difficulty or inability to maintain erection
- Decreased vaginal lubrication
- Decreased vaginal muscle tone
Physical Changes that affect Sexuality

- Fatigue can suppress sexual desire
- Spasticity can interfere with sexual positioning
- Pain
- Bladder and bowel
- Cognitive genital dissociation
  - When is sexual activity over?
- Redefining roles as lovers and partners
- Changes in sexual self-esteem
How to Start a Sex Conversation with your medical team

• Importance of getting the conversation going……
  – I have some questions about how my MS might be affecting my sexuality
  – I am concerned about my sex life now that I am living with MS. Do you have any suggestions about what I should look for or how I can plan for these changes?
  – I don’t know how to talk about my MS to a new person that I’m dating. Who can I talk to about this issue?
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Positions
Sexual Products and Accessories

- Sex is supposed to be fun….just in case you forgot
- Experiencing pleasure and sexual activity are ADLs…
- Functional limitations and abilities
- Comfort and desire for product
For Extended Reach
For Privacy
Ergonomic Vibrators
Extender Toys for Easy Reach
Penile Sleeve
Intimate Rider
Summary

- Sexuality is a crucial component of life
- Importance of exploring personal belief system
  - Disability
  - Sexuality
- It is your right to ask these questions as a regular part of your health care!
- If your medical team is unsure of how to answer your questions, send them my way!
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Additional Resources

- Bowel Problems- The Basic Facts (publication)
- Urinary Dysfunction and MS (publication)
- Keeping Intimacy Alive Webinar by Can Do MS
  http://www.mscando.org/
- Intimacy and Sexuality (publication)
- Sex and Intimacy (video)
  www.nationalmssociety.org/brochures
  www.nationalmssociety.org/educationalvideos
  1-800-344-4867