



Kidney Q&A

4-12 months

Life Options Rehabilitation Program

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www.lifeoptions.org

Q: How can renal disease affect my sexual function?

A: Being close to a partner can be a key part of quality of life. Your sexual function depends on your body and your mind working closely together. Kidney failure and other problems can have sexual side effects. These may include:

- **Hormone changes** can lead to less desire, trouble reaching orgasm, erectile problems in men, and changes in periods and vaginal dryness in women.
- **Anemia**—a shortage of oxygen-carrying red blood cells—can cause severe fatigue, and erectile problems in men. Treating anemia with EPO can improve your energy level and sexual function.
- **Depression** can lower your mood, cause sleep problems, and reduce desire. Anti-depressant medications and counseling can help you to feel more hopeful and see the light at the end of the tunnel.
- **Fear** can interfere with your ability to enjoy sex. Some people worry that their partner will catch their kidney disease. Kidney problems are not contagious.
- **Diabetes** can reduce blood flow to the sex organs and damage nerves, which can cause arousal and erectile problems. Good blood sugar control can help you keep your sexual health.
- **Prescription drugs**, like blood pressure pills, can have sexual side effects.

- **Street drugs, heavy drinking, or smoking** can have side effects that can reduce sexual function. Reducing these behaviors can improve your sex life.

What *I* can do to improve my sexual function:

- Track my lab tests to be sure I am getting enough dialysis.
- Know my hemoglobin level (it should be 10-12 g/dL) _____ g/dL and EPO dose _____ to be sure my anemia is well-treated.
- Talk with my social worker or doctor if I feel depressed or afraid.
- Check my blood sugar levels if I am diabetic and improve my control.
- Ask my pharmacist if any of my medications has sexual side effects, and if there are any substitutes my doctor could prescribe.
- Avoid street drugs, heavy drinking, or smoking.
- Consider getting more treatment by doing daily or nocturnal hemodialysis at home or in a center. Learn more at www.homedialysis.org.
- Visit module 11 of Kidney School™: *Sexuality and Fertility* at www.kidneyschool.org to learn more about sexual function.