Get fit

By following exercises you have learnt on the Pain Management Programme, you can become more flexible and reduce your pain, so that sexual activity is no longer an activity to be feared or avoided. You may also become more independent, so that your partner no longer needs to be your carer, and can return to being your lover.

Comfortable positions

Once you feel ready to make love again, you may need to be a little more adventurous than in the past, perhaps using cushions to support your back. A warm bath may be helpful to reduce pain and relax muscles, and you may benefit from taking appropriate painkillers half an hour before you begin to make love.

Some pain conditions prevent people managing sexual intercourse, but that does not need to prevent them from enjoying a rewarding sex life, using alternatives such as foreplay and massage. Sex is about giving as well as receiving, enjoying each other’s bodies and reminding each other how much you love each other. You may no longer be able to leap off the top of the wardrobe, but then not many of us ever could.

Further sources of information.

Spine-Dr.com "Sex and the back: Taking the pain out of sex" leaflet available online.
www.spine-dr.com/site/sex/sex_article1.html

Pain Concern www.painconcern.org.uk Unit 1-3, 62 -66 Newcraighall Road Fort Kinnard Edinburgh EH15 3HS “Sex and Chronic Pain” Leaflet available. Phone: 0300 123 0789


The Pain Relief Foundation is not responsible for the content of any information provided by another organization nor does it endorse any product or service mentioned or advised by any other organization.

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www.thewaltoncentre.nhs.uk

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Other leaflets in the series:

- Back Pain
- Fibromyalgia
- Headache
- Sciatica
- Diabetes Pain
- Trigeminal Neuralgia
- Arthritis
- Phantom Limb Pain
- CRPS
- Shingles & PHN
- Cancer Pain
- Drugs for nerve pain
- Strong opioids for chronic pain
- Over the counter medicines for pain
- Central Post Stroke Pain

Disclaimer: If you have a pain problem which needs treatment you must contact your own doctor. He can refer you to a pain clinic in your area. This leaflet is for information only and should not be treated as a substitute for the medical advice of your doctor. The Pain Relief Foundation cannot offer individual medical advice.
Other stresses
People in pain are not the only people who may have difficulties with sex. Other stresses in life commonly have an effect on relationships, for example financial problems or other family problems.

FACTORS FROM WITHIN THE RELATIONSHIP

You
A person's sexuality is about more than just the act of lovemaking. Feelings of masculinity or femininity may be reduced if your role has changed because of pain, for example by loss of employment, financial independence or homemaking abilities. Making an effort to become more involved in day to day activities with a partner can help to open lines of communication and lead to both of you feeling more valued.

How you feel about yourself will affect how you respond to your partner. You can start by ensuring that you look good – taking care of personal hygiene, getting dressed every day, shaving regularly, getting a new hairstyle, buying some new clothes. These efforts will raise your self-esteem and help you to feel more desirable – and give you less of a shock when you walk past a mirror! Looking good will help your partner to fancy you (again), and help you both to see beyond the pain to the person within.

Motivation
Maybe you just cannot be bothered to try to rebuild a sex life. Chronic pain can drain your energies as you try to cope with everyday life, and boosting a relationship may seem to require a level of energy which you feel you lack. However, helping you to learn to focus away from your pain is one of the main focuses of the Pain Management Programme, and what better way than by working towards the pleasures of good sex? You may feel that you are just too tired, especially if pain disturbs your sleep – remember that a little physical activity at bedtime is relaxing and helps to promote a good night’s sleep!

Fear of movement
Of course, lovemaking requires you to hold and be held by your partner, and to exercise joints and muscles. If you are frightened of your pain increasing with movement, then you are likely to become tense, and even avoid physical contact. You may need to start by working on the exercises learnt on the Programme to help you to become more supple and confident about exercise. You may have got into the habit of avoiding physical contact or tensing up if your partner approaches you, which may be interpreted as rejection.

Your partner

Fear of causing harm
Your partner is a witness to your day to day struggles to cope with pain, and may be fearful that cuddling you will cause an increase in pain, especially if you have pushed them away in the past. Your partner may have simply given up trying to approach you in a sexual way, maybe feeling that you no longer care for them.

Your partner as your carer
The nature of a loving relationship may alter if one of the partners has to provide intimate care for the other.

Making changes
If you have read this far, you may have decided that you would like to begin to rebuild your sex life, but are unsure how to start. Read on...

Communication
It is surprising that, in this day and age, when sex is discussed and portrayed daily on television and in the media, that may people find discussing sexual matters embarrassing and to be avoided. However, if you and your partner are going to please each other sexually, then talking is the first step. Your partner may not know that it is your pain that causes you to avoid sex and physical contact. Talking and listening to each other, in a relaxed and non-confrontational way is essential - you may like to open channels of communication by showing your partner these pages.

Start slowly
Think back to the early days of your courtship - holding hands, kissing, getting to know each other physically and emotionally, maybe cuddling up on the couch to watch a movie. Set aside time for each other. Each of these gentle steps can lead on to something better!