



Having a healthy sex life when you have Chronic Kidney Disease

Patient Information



Working together for better patient information

Coming to terms with a diagnosis of chronic kidney disease (CKD) can be difficult. CKD can affect different aspects of your life, including your mood and sex life. Both men and women with CKD may suffer with difficulties having or desiring sex. This leaflet describes some of the problems you may experience and ways in which you can get help.



Is it common to not want as much sex with CKD?

A low sex drive (libido) is very common in people with kidney disease.

It is due a combination of factors including hormone imbalances (common in both men and women), medications, tiredness, anxiety and low self-esteem.

I don't feel attractive any more - is this common?

Yes, people with CKD may worry that their partner will not find them desirable anymore due to the changes that have occurred to their **body**. It is important to talk to your partner if you feel like this, as they may be able to help you feel more positive and desirable.

If you find this difficult you may find it helpful to speak to your doctor first. Some renal units will have a specialist counsellor who you can ask to see as well or instead of your doctor.

What help is available?

Psychosexual counselling is a type of counselling that deals with sexual problems. It can be very helpful in exploring your feelings and regaining your confidence. There are also practical things that can help. For example if you are being treated with a peritoneal dialysis (PD) catheter, a support belt can keep your catheter tucked out of the way. You may also want to talk to your kidney team about your medications as they can be changed to try to reduce any side effects. Your kidney team may also be able to help with fatigue by making sure your iron levels and blood count (haemoglobin) are within the target range and adjusting your dialysis schedule if needed. Your doctor may also refer you to a sexual health clinic to check your hormone levels.





MEN

I have the desire to have sex, but when it comes to it I can't get an erection. Is this common?

Erectile problems (difficulty getting or maintaining an erection) are very common in men with CKD. You may feel embarrassed talking about this but treatment is often straightforward and is available on the NHS so talk to your GP or your kidney team. They can review your medicines to see if they may be contributing to your erection problems. General lifestyle measures such as drinking less alcohol, stopping smoking, weight loss and taking regular exercise may also help.

What are the other options for me if this doesn't work?

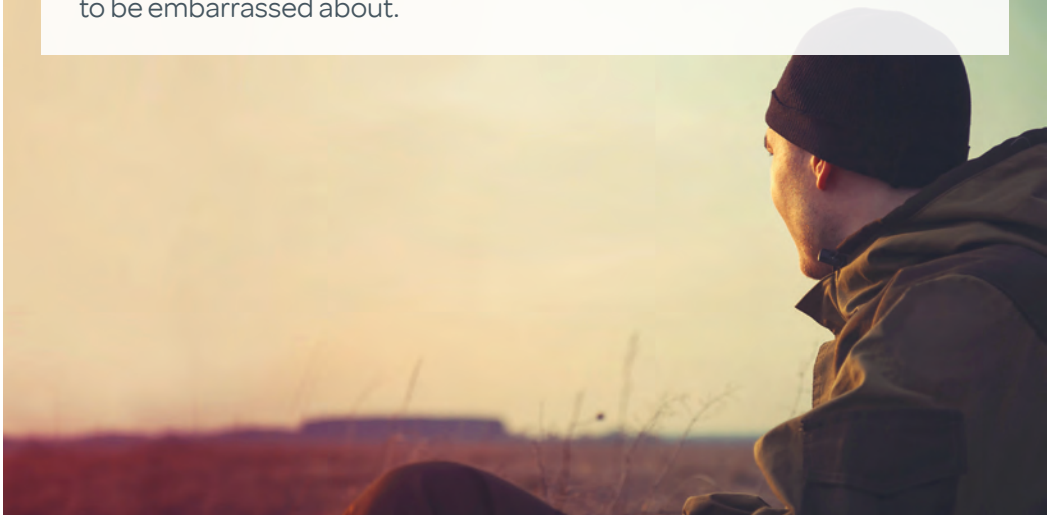
If these changes do not work for you, there are several treatment options, which should allow you to have a normal sex life. Treatments have improved substantially over the years. Your GP may be able to prescribe you medication or can refer you to a specialist sexual health clinic. You can also make an appointment with the clinic without going to your GP.

Viagra is one of the treatments that you can try to improve erections. This is now available to all men as the generic drug called sildenafil. It is important to check with your doctor that it is safe to take as there are some side effects with it.

Viagra can be bought online but this is not recommended as many of these sites sell fake tablets or the tablets have different doses. Always make sure that you get your tablets from a registered doctor in the UK and a pharmacist in the UK.

I've tried Viagra and it doesn't work. Is there anything else?

Other treatments may be available if Viagra does not work. If you have a transplant kidney or are receiving dialysis, you may be able to get some of these treatments for free. Please speak to your GP about the options. Remember that many men are in this position and it is nothing to be embarrassed about.





WOMEN

I don't feel the same level of desire as before. Is this normal?

It is very common for women with CKD to experience low sexual desire or difficulty or pain having sex. This can be due to the side effects of the medicines you take, tiredness, low self-esteem, anxiety or low hormone levels. If you are concerned by the effects on your sex life, speak to your doctor and ask to see a renal counsellor. If your renal unit does not have a specialist counsellor, ask your GP to refer you to a psychosexual counsellor.

It hurts when I have sex. What can I do?

Talk to your GP if you experience pain when having sex. They can examine you for specific physical causes, prescribe treatments (such as oestrogen cream) or refer you to a gynaecologist if needed.

Women with CKD can often go through early menopause or temporarily stop having periods due to an imbalance in hormone levels. Talk to your GP if you are concerned about this.

If you are of child bearing age it is important to think about birth control even if you think you may be unable to have children, as there is a small possibility of pregnancy.

Remember that you are not alone. Sexual health issues are common in people with CKD and your doctor will be happy to talk over any concerns that you may have to help improve the situation for you and your partner.





Where can I find out more information?

- NHS Choices - Chronic Kidney Disease:
www.nhs.uk/conditions/kidney-disease/living-with
- Kidney Care UK – Pregnancy and CKD: www.kidneycareuk.org/documents/182/Pregnancy_and_Chronic_Kidney_Disease.pdf



 www.kidneycareuk.org

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