

# Sexual satisfaction in women increases with age

January 3 2012

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A new study of sexually active older women has found that sexual satisfaction in women increases with age and those not engaging in sex are satisfied with their sex lives. A majority of study participants report frequent arousal and orgasm that continue into old age, despite low sexual desire. The study appears in the January issue of the *American Journal of Medicine*.

Researchers from the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and the Veterans Affairs San Diego Healthcare System evaluated [sexual activity](#) and satisfaction as reported by 806 older women who are part of the Rancho Bernardo Study (RBS) cohort, a group of women who live in a planned community near San Diego and whose health has been tracked for medical research for 40 years. The study measured the prevalence of current sexual activity; the characteristics associated with sexual activity including demographics, health, and hormone use; frequency of arousal, lubrication, orgasm, and pain during sexual intercourse; and [sexual desire](#) and satisfaction in older women.

The median age in the study was 67 years and 63% were postmenopausal. Half the respondents who reported having a partner had been sexually active in the last 4 weeks. The likelihood of sexual activity declined with increasing age. The majority of the sexually active women, 67.1%, achieved orgasm most of the time or always. The youngest and oldest women in the study reported the highest frequency of orgasm satisfaction.

40% of all women stated that they never or almost never felt sexual desire, and one third of the sexually active women reported low sexual desire. Lead investigator Elizabeth Barrett-Connor, MD, Distinguished Professor and Chief, Division of Epidemiology, Department of Family and [Preventive Medicine](#), University of California, San Diego School of Medicine, comments, "Despite a correlation between sexual desire and other [sexual function](#) domains, only 1 in 5 sexually active women reported high sexual desire. Approximately half of the women aged 80 years or more reported arousal, lubrication, and orgasm most of the time, but rarely reported sexual desire. In contrast with traditional linear model in which desire precedes sex, these results suggest that women engage in sexual activity for multiple reasons, which may include affirmation or sustenance of a relationship."

Regardless of partner status or sexual activity, 61% of all women in this cohort were satisfied with their overall sex life. Although older age has been described as a significant predictor of low [sexual satisfaction](#), the percentage of RBS sexually satisfied women actually increased with age, with approximately half of the women over 80 years old reporting sexual satisfaction almost always or always. Not only were the oldest women in this study the most satisfied overall, those who were recently sexually active experienced orgasm satisfaction rates similar to the youngest participants. "In this study, sexual activity was not always necessary for sexual satisfaction. Those who were not sexually active may have achieved sexual satisfaction through touching, caressing, or other intimacies developed over the course of a long relationship," says first author Susan Trompeter, MD, Associate Clinical Professor of Medicine, Division of General Internal Medicine, Department of Medicine at the University of California, San Diego School of Medicine and Staff Physician at the VA San Diego Healthcare System.

"Emotional and physical closeness to the partner may be more important than experiencing orgasm. A more positive approach to female sexual

health focusing on sexual satisfaction may be more beneficial to [women](#) than a focus limited to female sexual activity or dysfunction," Trompeter concludes.

**More information:** The article is "Sexual Activity and Satisfaction in Healthy Community-Dwelling Older Women," by Susan E. Trompeter, MD, Ricki Bettencourt, MS, and Elizabeth Barrett-Connor, MD. It appears in the *American Journal of Medicine*, Volume 125, Issue 1 (January 2012)

Provided by Elsevier

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