

# Sexual dysfunction often accompanies cardiovascular disease

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A Deakin University researcher is looking to lift the taboo on the sexual problems that are often an unspoken side-effect for the 3.72 million Australians living with cardiovascular disease.

Dr Leah East, a senior lecturer with Deakin's School of Nursing and Midwifery, said [cardiovascular disease](#) can cause more than heart problems, with up to 87 per cent of people also experiencing [sexual dysfunction](#).

"Sexual dysfunction is often an unspoken side-effect of cardiovascular disease, but it doesn't need to be," Dr East said.

"Unfortunately, [sexual health](#) is often seen as a taboo topic by healthcare professionals and patients alike, so many people are suffering in silence. To help break the silence on sexual health, I am conducting a study to develop a sexual health and wellbeing tool aimed at opening up the conversation between patient and healthcare professional."

Cardiovascular disease includes conditions that affect the heart and blood vessels, such as heart attack, angina, high blood fats and high blood pressure. The medicines used to treat the disease can often cause [sexual problems](#), which, if untreated, can result in depression and anxiety, poor self-esteem and affect personal relationships.

Despite research showing that patients want and welcome information and care associated with their sexual health and wellbeing, these needs

are often not met. Dr East is hoping that a sexual health and wellbeing screening tool will help to fill this gap.

"Being treated for cardiovascular disease should not come at the expense of an active and fulfilling sex life," Dr East said.

"Providing health professionals with a screening tool would enable routine screening to identify possible problems and assist in providing appropriate sexual health care."

Dr East is looking for [healthcare professionals](#) and people with cardiovascular disease to be part of the study.

"We are looking for people aged over 18 years who have been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease to be interviewed about their expectations and information needs when it comes to their sexual health," Dr East said.

"Healthcare professionals, including medical doctors, registered nurses, psychologists, social workers and sexual health counsellors, will be consulted to provide their opinion about sexual health, the common risk factors that are associated with adverse sexual health among cardiovascular patients and the essential elements in providing sexual health care to patients."

Provided by Deakin University

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