

Breaking the silence on cardiovascular disease and sexual health

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Cardiovascular disease is more than a heart problem, with up to 87 per cent of the 3.72 million people living with the disease also experiencing sexual dysfunction.

A new Deakin University study is looking to break the silence on this often unspoken side-effect of [cardiovascular disease](#) with the aim of opening up the conversation between patients and [health care](#) providers.

"Sexual health is often seen as a taboo topic by healthcare professionals and patients alike, so many people are suffering in silence," said Dr Leah East, a senior lecturer with Deakin's School of Nursing and Midwifery.

"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. If left untreated, this can result in depression and anxiety, poor self-esteem and affect personal relationships.

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

"Research tell us that patients want and welcome information and care

associated with their sexual health and wellbeing, however these needs are often not met.

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

People aged over 18 years who have been diagnosed with cardiovascular disease are invited to be part of the study that will involve interviews about their expectations and information needs when it comes to sexual health. Health care professionals are also called on to provide their views on sexual health and the essential elements in providing [sexual health](#) care to patients.

Provided by Deakin University

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