

# Consensual sex is key to happiness and good health, science says

February 13 2018, by Shervin Assari

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As we approach Valentine's Day, it's nice to celebrate love and, one the

best parts about it, sex. As a doctor and epidemiologist who studies sex, I bring good news for Valentine's Day. It's not just that sex is fun – it's also good for your physical and mental health.

Some of my research is focused on how [men and women differ](#) in the links between [sexuality](#), [mental and physical health](#), and [relationship quality](#). In this article, I write from my findings and that of others on how sex is important to our love, [mental health](#), relations and survival. At the end, I suggest a solution for individuals who are avoiding sex for a common reason – chronic disease.

## Good sex makes us happy

Good sex is an inseparable part of our [well-being](#) and happiness. Those of us who engage in more sex report better [quality of life](#). Sexual intercourse is linked to [high satisfaction](#) across life domains. In one of my [studies](#) on 551 married patients with heart disease, individuals who had a higher frequency of [sexual intercourse](#) reported higher marital quality, marital consensus, marital coherence, marital affection expression and overall marital satisfaction. These results are replicated in multiple [studies](#).

In a study by another team, partners who both experienced [orgasm](#) during sex were considerably happier. These findings are shown inside and [outside](#) of the United States.

## Sex keeps us alive

Although [early initiation of sex](#) such as during adolescence is a risk factor for mortality, having a sound sexual life in adulthood is linked to low mortality. In a seven-year follow-up [study](#) of men 17 years old or older, erectile dysfunction and having no sexual activity at baseline

predicted increased mortality over time. Similar [findings](#) were shown in younger men. This is probably because more physically [healthy](#) individuals are sexually active.

## No sex and forced sex makes us depressed

There is a two-way road between bad sex and depression. Depression is also a reason for bad sex, particularly for [women](#). And, men who are depressed are more likely to sexually [abuse](#) their partners.

And it's important to note, in the wake of continuing news of sexual assault and abuse, that [forced sex](#) in intimate relations make people depressed, paranoid, jealous, and ruins relationships. Couples who experience unwanted sex have a higher risk for experiencing [other types](#) of abuse, as bad habits tend to cluster.

## Sex different for men and women?

Men and women differ in the degree to which their sexual act is attached to their physical, emotional, and relational well-being. Various reasons play a role among both genders, but for [women](#), sexual function is heavily influenced by mental [health](#) and relationship quality.

By contrast, for [men](#) sexual health reflects [physical health](#). This is also intuitive as the most common sexual disorders are due to problems with [desire and erection](#) for women and men, respectively.

## Reasons for avoiding sex

As I explained in another article in The Conversation, sexual avoidance for those who have a partner or are in a relationship happens for a long list of reasons, including pain, medications, depression and [chronic](#)

[disease](#). Common diseases such as heart disease interfere with sex by causing [fear and anxiety of sexual intercourse](#).

Aging should not be considered as a sexless age. Studies have shown that older adults acquire skills and strategies that can buffer age-related declines in their sexual life, particularly when they are in a positive relationship. This is called seniors' [sexual wisdom](#).

## Back on track

Because people avoid sex for a variety of reasons, there is no single answer for those who want to become sexually active again. For many [men](#), physical health problems are barriers. If they suffer from [erectile dysfunction](#), they can seek medical help for that.

If fear of sex in the presence of chronic disease is a problem, there can be medical help for that as well. For many [women](#), common barriers are [relational dissatisfaction](#) and mental health. For both men and women, the first step is to talk about their sexual life with their physician, counselor or therapist.

At least [half](#) of all medical visits do not cover any discussion about [sexual life](#) of patients. Embarrassment and lack of time are among the most common barrier. So make sure you make time to talk to your doctor or health care provider.

Neither the doctor nor the patient should wait for the other person to start a dialogue about their sexual concerns. The "don't tell, don't ask" does not take us anywhere. The solution is "do tell, do ask."

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