

How important is sex to women as they age?

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Despite a common belief that women lose interest in sex as they age, a new study demonstrates that a significant percentage of women continue to rate sex as important throughout midlife. The study also identified those factors affecting which women continue to value sex most. Study results will be presented during the 2020 Virtual Annual Meeting of The

North American Menopause Society (NAMS), which opens on September 28.

A number of studies have previously shown that the importance of sex is highly correlated with [sexual function](#) among midlife [women](#).

Longitudinal studies have allowed researchers to examine how the importance of sex changes as women age, giving way to the premise that women lose interest in sex as they age.

This new study included more than 3,200 women who participated in the Study of Women's Health Across the Nation. Its researchers sought to evaluate how various factors affected a woman's interest in sex throughout the menopause transition. Factors included race, education, partner status, body mass index, blood pressure, menopause status, hormones, depression symptoms, perceived stress, antidepressant use, [sexual orientation](#), sexual satisfaction, pelvic pain, vaginal dryness, and hot flashes.

Based on this analysis, researchers identified three distinct trajectories in importance of sex with aging. For almost half of the women (45%), sex was important early in midlife and became less so over time. For roughly a quarter of the women (27%), sex remained highly important to them throughout midlife, and for another quarter (28%), sex was of low importance during midlife.

From an ethnic perspective, black women were more likely to rate sex as important for the duration of midlife, whereas Chinese and Japanese women were more likely to rate sex as not important or to see drops in importance. Other variables included women with [depression symptoms](#), who were more likely to have low importance or see drops in importance of sex. Better sexual satisfaction was associated with maintained high levels of importance of sex over time, as was higher education.

"In contrast to prior literature reporting that the importance of sex decreases as women move through midlife, we found that, for a quarter of women, sex remains highly important to them throughout midlife," says Dr. Holly Thomas from the University of Pittsburgh, lead author of the study abstract, "How important is sex to women during [midlife](#)?"

"Studies like these provide valuable insights to [healthcare providers](#) who may otherwise dismiss a woman's waning sexual desire as a natural part of aging," says Dr. Stephanie Faubion, NAMS medical director. "Often there are other treatable reasons, such as [vaginal dryness](#) or depression, as to why a woman's interest in sex may have decreased."

Drs. Thomas and Faubion are available for interviews before and after the presentation at the virtual annual meeting.

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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