

Research: Sexual health problems in women with type 1 diabetes need to be addressed

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Sexual problems are a well-documented complication of diabetes in

men. But research on how women's sexuality is affected by different types of diabetes is very limited, find Swedish researchers in a new publication.

"Almost every second woman in the study had signs of sexual dysfunction," says Anne-Marie Wangel, senior lecturer at Malmö University.

In the study, she sent out a questionnaire to women between the ages of 45 and 66, who had had lived with type 1 diabetes for more than 15 years.

"We chose to focus on women who have had type 1 diabetes for a long time to investigate the occurrence of complications on [sexual function](#) for just this selected group," she said. 212 women responded to the survey in which they were asked questions about sexual function, levels of desire, the ability to get aroused, and pain during sexual activity. Of those who responded, 45 percent showed signs of sexual dysfunction.

"One in three had problems with feeling [sexual arousal](#), almost one in five experienced pain during [sexual activity](#), and one in four had problems getting wet when aroused," says Wangel.

Sexual dysfunction can be linked to reduced quality of life and depression; the study therefore also included questions about [depressive symptoms](#). When the women answered questions about signs of depression and mental illness, 15 percent stated that they had recurring thoughts of harming themselves.

There was also found to a statistical association between low sexual function and symptoms of depression.

"One solution as to how [healthcare professionals](#) can become better at

identifying these issues is to ask open-ended questions to the women, or carry out yearly screening with questions about, for example, sexuality or how they feel mentally," says Wangel.

"The women might have their annual examinations where the focus is on medical issues and insulin doses. Questions about sexual function or urinary, vaginal and vulva problems—such as having pain or dry mucous membranes—may not be included. Depressive problems in this patient group also need to be identified to be able to refer them, if required, to a psychologist or counselor," she adds.

More information: Anne-Marie Wangel and Karin Stenzelius, Sexual Function and Depressive Symptoms in Middle-Aged Women with LongLasting Type 1 Diabetes – A Cross-Sectional Study, *Journal of Nursing & Healthcare* (2021). [opastonline.com/open-access/se ... -sectional-study.pdf](https://opastonline.com/open-access/se...-sectional-study.pdf)

Provided by Malmö University

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