



## **The Choreography of Lovemaking**

From page 185 of “How to Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life”

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We’ve established that sex is good for you, whatever age you are. Now we’re going to wreck another misconception that seniors don’t enjoy sex as much as younger people do. All the evidence suggests just the opposite: people over fifty-five enjoy sex as much or more than their younger counterparts.

How is that possible? Let’s begin with the obvious: no kids and fewer distractions. Unlike when you’re younger and have to deal with the demands of children, the stresses of your job, and all the other myriad comings and goings of life, when you’re older you have more control of your time. You can make love when and where you like. That freedom is conducive to passion and spontaneity.

But also, when you’re older, you’re better at sex. You know what you want, and what’s more, you know just what pleases the other. “Younger people don’t really know about the choreography of lovemaking,” Foley in her interview. “It develops over time with communication, assisted by the natural process of aging for men, which tends to delay orgasm a bit. So for men as they get older – if you think about the sexual response cycle as being desire, arousal, orgasm – their sexual response cycle slows down a bit, and women’s is slower in general. The sexual response cycles for men and women match up better, and they tend to focus more on the eroticism of their sexuality, not just the ‘home run’ of an orgasm. Couples in their 60’s actually talk about feeling like they’re more in sync now in terms of their sexual activity

A couple’s unbreakable emotional bond is another reason sex is often better in the Second Prime of life. You are more intimate. You know about the small touches, mood creators, and the anticipation of sex that leads to greater arousal and an experience that can last for hours. At the same time, you know each other’s signals, so you know when he or she might not be in the mood for a long, slow evening of seduction. Sex should be fun, and the more you know about what makes each other swoon, the more fun it is.

### **When Being Bad Isn’t Any Good**

One of the most common reasons seniors do not have frequent sex is simply that they suffer from poor health. They may not have taken care of their bodies over the years, they may be overweight and have little energy, or they may suffer from a broad range of medical problems from arthritis to high blood pressure that make them afraid to have sex for fear it will be a danger to their health.

If you’re in pain, lethargic, under stress, or simply don’t feel healthy and well, sex will not be very much on your mind. Problems such as an enlarged prostate or treatment for

prostate cancer can produce impotence in men through new treatments such as radioactive “seed” implantation have been developed in recent years that specifically reduce the risk of sexual side effects – a sign that the medical community is finally recognizing the importance of sex in the senior years.

Another reason some older Americans suffer from poor sex lives is that they are on medication that inhibits their sexual drive. *“A lot of times, people will come in and say to me, “Things don’t work like they used to,” says Dr. Weiss. “One of the first things I do is have them medically checked to make sure everything is in working order. Once we see if there are any medications they’re on that are affecting their sexual performance, we can go from there.”* Medications for high blood pressure and antidepressants are known to reduce libido as well as erectile function. In fact, about 25 percent of cases of erectile dysfunction (ED) are due to medication. Other types of medication that can inhibit sex include:

- Antipsychotics like chlorpromazine and thioridazine
- Cholesterol lowering medications, including statins
- Medications for anxiety and sleeplessness

If you’re experiencing sexual problems and you’re taking prescription medication, ask your physician if what you’re taking can inhibit sexual drive or arousal. Then you can take the proper action.

Sometimes the causes of a poor sex life are more subtle. Couples may suffer from poor body image, comparing their older, less-toned and less-muscular bodies with the young, sleek bodies they see all over the media these days. It’s enough to make them feel inadequate, and if they’re ashamed of how their bodies look, they are not going to want to shed their clothes. Unfortunately, the bodies we see in the media are unrealistic – models and actors who have personal trainers, makeup artists, and all the time in the world to get in shape; after all, they’re paid to look good.

If you’re buying into the myth that everyone but you looks perfect, it’s time to ask yourself why. Do you really think you’re the only one who’s gotten older? Do you really think the changes in your body have gone unnoticed by your loved one? In the end, if you’re exercising, eating right, and taking care of your fitness and grooming, you’re going to look as good as you can look, and that breeds confidence. And as any mature person will tell you, confidence is sexy. If you haven’t taken care of yourself and are self-conscious about your body because of it, you know what to do. Get to the gym, start eating better, and develop a lifestyle around losing weight, moving, and being fit. You’ll find your confidence – and sexual energy – rushing back.

### **It’s the Relationship, Stupid**

A few pages back, we mentioned that women said relationship was a critical part of an enjoyable sex life. The same is true for men, especially as the ardor of your turns into the more deliberate, seductive sex of older age. The relationship matters.

“What we see come up in the literature is that women say, ‘don’t care if my husband takes Viagra or not, I’m still not interested in sex with him because he’s been a jerk for years.’” says Foley. “Viagra isn’t going to settle that problem.” She says that one of the biggest problems the couples she sees have – couples who should otherwise not have sexual difficulties – is that they don’t communicate about sex. They don’t discuss their relationships, love, or sex. In an article for SeniorJournal.com, she says, “They use euphemisms rather than communicating honestly with each other. Some older adults also don’t know where to obtain relationship information specific to their situation. When they do not find this information – a magazine article about sex, for example – they do not know how to broach the subject with their partners.

It’s virtually impossible to become aroused by someone, regardless of how good they look, when you feel alienated, resentful, or shut out. On the other hand, Second Prime couples who enjoy great sex, **says Weiss, “have a very young, positive, optimistic attitude.”**

In her book, *Sex & Love for Grownups: A No-Nonsense Guide to a Life of Passion*, Foley offers some additional advice about keeping the fires of passion burning in the years when they’re waning for more couples:

- *Live a life of connections.* Even if a perfect love eludes you, making sure that you have a wallet full of photos of family and friends will give meaning to live.
- *Don’t be afraid to try something new.* If you continue to see yourself as an adventurer or if you’ve never taken a risk to try new things, now’s the time.
- *Expect your relationship to be like your car.* No matter how much time and care you devote to your vehicle, it still occasionally breaks down and always needs maintenance. Relationships are like that too.
- *Abandon either/or thinking.* Life is complex, and thinking in rigid yes-or-no categories will often fail you. In order to respond to relationships and their complexity, think of diversity, plurality, and many possible solutions to a problem.
- *Take time to celebrate.* Ask people what they love about life and they’ll tell you it’s the very ordinariness of life that is spectacular about living. After a crisis, what really counts is the restoration of normalcy.
- *Love.* Relinquish the need for perfection and focus on what’s real.

### Getting Your Groove Back

If the relationship is great, but the sex isn’t, what can you do? Start with your health and fitness. Everything begins there. **Dr Weiss points out that everything you should be doing for a vital, lively Second Prime in general will also enhance your sex life. “Seniors with healthy sex lives exercise regularly, do things for their minds, get lots of sleep, and eat right,” she says. “Men make sure their prostate is healthy, they take vitamins. They have a really healthy lifestyle and a positive, healthy attitude.”**

Foley also emphasizes that for men who have lost some sexual functionality, PDE5 inhibitors (we won't state any brand names, but you know one of the drugs as a little blue pill) are godsend. "They're wonderful medications," she says. "For years as a sex therapist, people would come in with erectile dysfunction, and I would basically have to say, 'We don't really have anything for you to do, except just live with this.' So people are saying, 'Why should I live with erectile dysfunction when these drugs can help me?' They've really helped lots of couples." There are, as you probably know, some health concerns for men in taking such drugs, especially men who are taking nitrates for heart problems. But don't let fear condemn you to living with ED. Talk to a physician and find out if these drugs can help you.

Another step Boomers can take now to ensure better sex later is to practice Kegels (named after its creator), an exercise that works the pubococcygens for PC muscle. "That helps to strengthen orgasmic response for women: "The Kegel works the muscle that stops and starts the flow of urine. You know the muscle. There are two kinds of Kegels. One kind is what we call the 'blinker Kegel'. Meaning, you could sit at a long, left-turn light with your car blinker on and tense and relax your muscle in time with the blinker on the car. You might do fifty of those a day.

"Then we say to do about twenty to thirty of the other kind of Kegel," Foley continues, "which would be tense-hold-2-3-4-5, relax-2-3-4-5. Do those on top of your blinker Kegels, and you get a really good muscle workout. For women, this can prevent urinary incontinence and improve the flow of blood to the vagina to keep the vagina healthy and more supple. For men, they have striated muscles that hold the penis in place and help the penis stay steady when it's engorged with blood. Those striated muscles are actually exercised by doing Kegels."