

THE CONVERSATION

BIG ISSUES. INSPIRING STORIES. LET'S GET INTO IT



Let's
talk
about

sex...
after 40

Earlier this year, we polled our readers on the highs and lows of sex in midlife and beyond. Your responses ran the gamut from joyful (“I’m 75 and I’m having the best sex of my life!”) to...less joyful (“Things are not working the same”). You had questions about whether it’s possible to revive a flatlined sex drive, how to broach using toys in bed and whether toe-curling sex can still be had as we age. You asked, our experts answered! Read on for advice on your most pressing concerns, and hear from four women, aged 41 to 72, who are having their best sex yet—and how you can too.

PRODUCED BY **Maureen Halushak** AND **Erica Lenti** ILLUSTRATIONS BY **Raquel Romero** CREATED IN MIDJOURNEY

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I'm Having The Best Sex Of My Life—In My 40s

IT ALL STARTED when I ended my 15-year marriage. When we initially decided to open the marriage eight years in, I convinced myself it was for both our benefit: It'd help curb his infidelity, and allow me to explore both romantic and physical relationships with women and non-binary folks. I began to realize that I wanted to be loved and desired for who I was, not who my husband—or anyone else—wanted me to be. The divorce allowed me to see my sex life not as something to keep someone else satiated, but as a way to explore guilt-free pleasure.

When I would lay in bed with Jake, my first real relationship after the divorce, he'd trail kisses up and down my naked body. But the first few times that he lingered near my belly, I would instinctively reach to cover it. Without hesitation he would continue his kisses. It was such a simple gesture, but it changed my perception of my body's beauty. Spicy rendezvous with queer individuals also encouraged me to shed the hypersexualized femme uniform I was no longer comfortable in.

While it's okay to find pleasure in pleasing others, I now realize it's also okay to be selfish when it comes to my sex life. And that's made my 40s my best sex era—so far. —Eden Boudreau, 41

Laggy Libido?

Three of Canada's top sexual health experts answer your most burning questions about desire.



“Is it common to have zero sex drive in your 40s?” —Therese, 46

“One of the biggest surprises I've come across in my research is just how complex desire is,” says **Dr. Sophie Bergeron**, a psychologist and professor at the Université de Montréal. Relationship problems, poor body image and painful sex due to menopause (see page 38), among other factors, are all lust busters. She stresses that your sex life will evolve over time; ongoing communication about what you need is crucial.

“Is it okay to not want traditional sex at all anymore, just self-pleasuring?” —Tanya, 66

Yes! “There are no right or wrong ways for consenting adults to be sexual,” says **Bergeron**.

“I try, for my husband's sake, to be intimate once a week. Will I ever desire sex again?”

—Angie, 57

“The most common problem that sex therapists encounter is sexual desire discrepancy,” says **Dr. Peggy J. Kleinplatz**, a certified sex therapist and a professor in the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Ottawa. The first step to better sex? “Look at the quality of sex you're having and how it compares to the sex of your dreams,” she says. From there, talk to your partner about what the two of you can do to have the type of sex you want. Having trouble talking about it? Read a sexy book together, out loud. Doing this, she says, will help you get used to the vocabulary of sex.

“Can you revive a dead sex drive at 65?” —Terri, 65

Absolutely, says **Dr. Lori Brotto**, a psychologist and director of University of British Columbia's Sexual Health Research Laboratory. “It's about being creative and trying to identify the factors that will elicit your desire.” Her team recently conducted a study involving women ages 21 to 74 who, after using an online therapy program called eSense—which Brotto eventually hopes to take public—experienced 87 percent higher arousal and desire. —Maureen Halushak



Solo Act

Sex therapist **Sue McGarvie's** top three tips for having your best orgasm—on your own.

Get playful with toys

Take the time to find which sex toys get you going. Clitoral pumps, for instance, gently awaken dormant nerve endings by creating an air vacuum around the clitoris, while suction toys mimic oral pleasure with pulsing air—perfect for women who need stimulation without direct touch. “Orgasm cream”—a tingling ointment that you can purchase over-the-counter at most sex shops—increases blood flow where it matters most, which in turn triggers orgasm. And don't forget the lube (see page 38)!

Embrace your fantasies

Sexual fantasies aren't shameful—they're essential. Some women unlock pleasure using just their imagination, but plenty get a little help from porn. In fact, almost one-third of Pornhub users in Canada are women. For those who prefer reading, erotic books offer a range of fantasy options.

Shed the stigma

Perhaps most importantly, grant yourself permission to explore. Some women need nipple stimulation or anal play to reach climax—common variations that are rarely discussed openly. Explore new options, and do what feels best.

Toy With Us

Want to level up your sex life? There's a vibe for that.

Sometimes it's nice to give your hands (and other body parts) a helping...hand.

Toys can offer more intense sensations, switch things up a bit and just plain get 'er done—whether that's a quick O or a long, slow build.

We asked **Lilin Thibodeau**, who runs Toronto's trusted sex shop institution *Come As You Are*, to share some of the store's best-selling toys. —Gillian Grace



THE ENTRY-LEVEL VIBE

This is a good starting point for people new to toys. “It's less intimidating,” Thibodeau says. You can use it internally or externally, and when you're ready to up your game, it works for G-spot stimulation too.

THE SPOT G-SPOT VIBE, \$35

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I'm Having The Best Sex Of My Life—In My 50s

MY SEX LIFE with my husband changed drastically more than a decade ago when we booked tickets for what we thought was a clothing-optional cruise. It turned out to be a swingers cruise. We'd been monogamous together for three years, but we decided we were both game for a new experience. Everyone on the cruise was friendly, and we met an experienced couple who showed us the ropes. We decided we didn't want to be monogamous, and as a



MAKING THE INTRODUCTION
 It's normal to be nervous about broaching using toys in bed, says Thibodeau. Assure your partner that it "comes from a desire to explore your pleasure together."



WE-VIBE WAND 2, \$190

THE ONE FOR COUPLES

People in long-term relationships looking to try something new might enjoy a couples' vibe. This We-Vibe wand is specifically designed for two. "Because it's such a low profile, it accommodates a penis [or other toys] being inserted at the same time," Thibodeau says. This is a basic starter model, but some upgraded We-Vibes also include Bluetooth "so you can play from different areas of the house."



DUAL RIDER, \$150

THE RIDER

Rider- or grinder-style toys are newer to the party. They're designed to straddle—different areas of the rider have different sensations and motions, so "you can [adjust] the intensity," Thibodeau says. Put it on a chair or harder surface for more intensity, or on a softer surface like a pillow or bed for less.



LELO INA 2, \$260

THE RABBIT

Lelo is a popular choice for women 40+, Thibodeau says. It's a rabbit-style vibrator, making it a great upgrade from your basic toy. (Rabbit vibes have two wands—like bunny ears! The longer one allows for internal or external stimulation, while the shorter is for external use only.) This style takes a bit more exploring to see whether it works for you, Thibodeau says, "but the people who love it really love it."



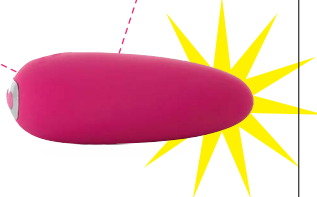
VIBRATEX MAGIC WAND, FROM \$90

THE CLASSIC

This iconic sex toy was originally marketed as a personal massager, making it an ideal gateway toy for many. It also comes in micro, **mini**, medium and rechargeable versions.

THE POCKET ROCKET

This popular, fun-sized toy conceals big oomph in a small, egg-shaped package. **JE JOUE MIMI SOFT, \$115**



couple, we made the call to open our relationship.
 Over the years we've attended swinger-friendly activities as a couple and have gotten to know other people individually. It hasn't always been smooth sailing. At one point I fell in love with another man, and our relationship became polyamorous. My husband and I had to learn how to navigate the boundaries of that arrangement. At one point I was afraid that the tension might end

our relationship. But our marriage is strong, and we came out of that period more connected than ever. Today, we each support the other pursuing connections with lovers—I currently have one other lover outside of my marriage.
 My husband and I have always had great sex, but non-monogamy made our sex life even better. To this day, my husband knows my body better than anyone, but we've found that being open just creates even more sexual energy

in our relationship. Good sex leads to more good sex. And to me, what constitutes "good sex" can be really basic. It doesn't have to be kinky or creative or unconventional. If sex feels pleasurable and emotionally fulfilling—if you can reflect on your sex life and feel satisfied—that's what matters.
 In the future, my only hope is that we get to keep experiencing sex the way we do. I hope that it lasts a long time. —Anonymous, 54

Ending a Dry Spell

An MD's science-backed guide to treating vaginal dryness.

FOR MIDLIFE WOMEN, sex can sometimes be painful. The most common culprit: vaginal dryness. More than 50 percent of post-menopausal women will experience symptoms of genitourinary syndrome of menopause (GSM), characterized by a loss of vaginal elasticity and dryness. That's thanks to the multisystem shifts that take place during the transition: as estrogen decreases, the vagina becomes less elastic, the vaginal tissues become thinner and the cells inside the vagina turn less acidic and in turn, more dry.

But dryness is not just a side effect of menopause—some pre-menopausal women on birth control and postpartum women who are breastfeeding can experience it too.

The first step toward relief is recognizing and identifying your symptoms, says Dr. Shafeena Premji, a Calgary-based doctor who sits on the board of directors of the Canadian Menopause Society. If sex feels painful, it's crucial to talk to your doctor about treatment options.

Those options may include menopause hormone therapy (MHT), which is systemic, or vaginal hormone therapy, which is localized. For menopausal women who experience other symptoms, like hot flashes or

night sweats, MHT may also help to improve GSM.

For those tackling vaginal dryness only, Premji says the most effective treatment is the use of vaginal estrogen therapy products. These products come in the form of tablets, creams and inserts. They are prescribed by your doctor to be used locally (in the vagina), so they don't enter the bloodstream like MHT, and usually have fewer side effects.

A vaginal moisturizer can also be prescribed or picked up at your local

pharmacy. Just like a facial moisturizer, it's applied to the vulva and inside the vagina to keep tissues hydrated—and must be used consistently in order to see results.

And for women looking to improve dryness during intercourse, Premji says a lubricant can be used in combination with other products. Look for water- or silicone-based lubes, and apply inside the vagina, on the vulva, on the penis or on any toys you'll be using. (You can warm it up with your hands before application.) —Erica Lenti



**OH,
CANADA!**

Four great
homegrown
lubricants for
patriotic play.

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I'm Having The Best Sex Of My Life—In My 60s

WHEN I WAS in my mid-50s, I went through a bad breakup. Once the dust settled, I realized I needed to take a break from dating to work on myself. I also had a busy job and kids to care for at home. I decided to stay single until the prospect of dating felt right again.

By the time I retired last year—a decade after that breakup—my kids had moved out, and I suddenly had a lot of “me” time. When summer rolled around, I started to think about dating again. Two of my besties had begun to casually date, and I noticed how much brighter and lighter they were. I had no interest in a serious relationship, but I’m adventurous and I like to have fun, and sex is a part of that.

So, at 64, I made a Facebook Dating account. Six months later,

I came across the profile of a man who lived about an hour away. We messaged online, then talked on the phone. Things between us felt comfortable and easy. About a month into chatting, we decided to meet in person. I wasn’t anxious, but I did wonder if my body would react to sex the same way it had in the past, or if the process would be more difficult.

We decided to meet at my date’s house. I’m no Barbie and my date is no Ken, but when we met up, the chemistry was instantly magnetic. We slept together that first day, which is unusual for me. There was a bit of physical discomfort at first, but once we got going it was total bliss. Sex in your 60s may not be physically the exact same as in earlier decades—lube and vaginal moisturizer help—but in my experience it’s definitely just as comfortable and just as fun.

These days, I’m still spending time with the same man. We’re having a blast seeing each other once every week or two, and, of course, having great sex. —Anonymous, 64



DIVA LUBRICATOR, \$17

From the makers of the OG Canadian menstrual cup, this lube—made from aloe vera gel—works with toys and latex condoms. shopdiva.com



HATHOR ORIGINAL LUBRICANT, \$20

Made in B.C. by a mother-daughter-run business, this water-based lube is very slippery, though you may need to reapply more often than silicone options. comeasyouare.com



JEMS, \$20

This woman-run brand makes a thick silicone lube. “Silicone stays put—it doesn’t dissolve, and it lasts longer,” says LilinThibodeau of Come As You Are. But it can’t be used with silicone-based toys (like those recommended on page 36). comeasyouare.com



HATHOR SUTIL LUXE, \$25

A slightly thicker water-based lube from the same mother-daughter team. comeasyouare.com —G.G.



How To Feel **Sexy** in a Perimenopausal Body

ANOTHER HOT TOPIC, based on responses to our sex survey? Body confidence. More specifically, readers were worried that the effects of aging meant they no longer fit the far-too-narrow definition of what society deems “sexy.”

But when it comes to sensuality and pleasure at any age, Toronto-based sex and relationships

educator Luna Matatas says it’s all about *feeling* sexy, not looking sexy. Here, her seven best tips for bringing sexy back.

Repeat after me: What you look like doesn’t define how much pleasure you’re capable of having.

“People with six-packs, people with the bodies you

think that you should have to be sexy, they are not having more orgasms than you,” Matatas says. So first: get comfortable with your body and have fun in it! That extends beyond the bedroom—it could mean dancing or yoga.

Figure out what pleasure means to you...

Ask yourself: “What can

this body do right now that feels really good?” That might mean sex, but it might not. “When I went through this journey of perimenopause, I really had to tap into myself,” says Matatas. “Do I actually like what I’m doing with this body—or am I doing it because I think other people will like it, or they’ll think I’m sexy?”

“ I’m Having The Best Sex Of My Life—In My 70s

WHEN I TURNED 50, I lost interest in having sex. I had worked for 30 years as a nurse and as a social service worker, mostly with people who were abused or exploited in the sex work industry, and I was subjected to a lot of vicarious sexual trauma. I also went into instant menopause at 50, after a hysterectomy due to endometriosis. I didn’t think I’d ever be interested in having sex again.

I thought about my lack of interest in sex from time to time, but it wasn’t top of mind. It didn’t affect my marriage too much, and my relationship to my husband was loving. Still, in my 60s, I wondered whether there might be a way to revive my interest in a healthy sexuality. I was curious about a somatic approach—body-centered therapies that explore how the mind-body connection might help us to heal trauma. I learned about a somatic sex educator in Vancouver who looked promising, and at age 66, I travelled from Manitoba for a session.



HOW TO TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR ABOUT SEX

We asked **Shirley Weir**, founder of the Menopause Chicks—a community dedicated to supporting women with quality, evidence-based health information and education—to walk us through what to say (even if it feels awkward).

1. Start by describing your goal for the appointment, your age and date of your last period

“I’m here to discuss the benefits of vaginal hormone therapy. As you know, I’m 55 and my last period was three years ago.”

2. Then describe your symptoms and the impact they’re having on your life

“I’m experiencing vulva and vaginal dryness, which makes exercising uncomfortable, and it’s also impacting my sex life. As well, I’ve had three UTIs in the last year, which disrupt my work day.”

3. Tell your doctor what you’ve researched and what it’s made you realize

“I’ve recently learned about the benefits of vaginal hormone therapy...and I’ve been reminded that I am not meant to suffer!”

4. Ask for help

“I’d like to discuss all of the approved treatment options. Will you help me make the decision that’s best for me?”

5. Don’t allow your concerns to be dismissed as “just part of getting older.”

“I understand vulva and vaginal dryness is common, but I’d like to explore the approved treatment options that will help me feel better.”



Your sexual health concerns are valid. Your quality-of-life matters. And you deserve care that includes your whole self—sexual health and all.

Somatic sex education is still taboo because it can involve touch. A core principle is something we call “choice and voice.” A lot of women are socialized to lay back and take what we’re offered sexually, but in somatic sex education, we learn to think about where exactly we would like to be touched for our pleasure. In order to receive that pleasure, you are required to actually ask for what you want. This helped me realize I was responsible for my own pleasure. By the time the first session was done, I felt as though my sexual pilot light had re-lit. With my husband’s support, I went back for several more sessions. I felt in charge of my sexuality, and I was able to take what I learned in those sessions about my own body, and apply that knowledge to my re-ignited sexual relationship with my husband, too.

My experience was so transformative that I decided to get certified as a somatic sex educator myself, and I began taking my own clients in 2021. At 72, I’m not only sexually liberated with a healthy interest in sex and a fulfilling sex life—I feel I’m in a position to help people as a practitioner as well.

—Wendy Scheirich, 72

...then live sensually (not just sexually)

Think about opportunities during the day when you could be more sensual with yourself. For example: “Are you eating in front of Netflix every day? Or are you tuning into the sensual experience that’s possible with food?”

Try feeling sexy without a destination

It’s good to get back into your body, Matatas says, but “it can feel like a lot of pressure to have to focus on orgasm. What about if the next time you’re in the shower, you put on a

sexy song, or you change the lighting?” Matatas will sometimes shower by candlelight, for instance.

Remember that sex is a body and mind process

Arousal starts in the brain, and most people need to get in the mood. That likely means being as relaxed as possible, and creating a stress-free environment where your mind can actually be present in your body. Get to a place where you’re not thinking about work, your kids or the giant dustball that lives under your couch. (And yes, this may be easier said than done.) —G.G.