



## Intimacy and Illness: Chronic Pain

### What is chronic pain?

Chronic pain is characterized as pain lasting a long period of time (months or years) and is often associated with another condition, such as an injury or other ongoing illness (cancer, arthritis, etc). The pain can range from mild to severe and is sometimes incurable. Health care providers recommend a number of things to help with chronic pain, including medications, acupuncture, psychotherapy, surgery, and behavior modification.

### Who is affected by chronic pain?

Anyone can have chronic pain. It depends on a number of factors such as age, injury (past or present), or disease (past or present).

### How can chronic pain affect my sexuality?

Chronic pain can affect your sexuality in different ways. You may have no interest in sexual activity because of fatigue or extreme pain. Certain pain medications may also affect sexual desire. Fear of rejection by a partner or performance anxiety could affect your sexuality as well. The anxiety and stress that may come with the fear of pain during sexual activity could result in a decrease in desire. Chronic pain could also drive a wedge between you and your partner, causing each person to have less desire for the other person.

### How can I improve my sexuality when faced with chronic pain?

It may be necessary to talk to your partner before becoming intimate. Discuss your feelings about sexuality and intimacy and what you are comfortable (or not comfortable) doing. It may also be necessary to re-evaluate how you define sexuality and intimacy. What was once pleasurable for you may have changed. Experimenting with new types of stimulation may be beneficial, such as different types of touching, new kinds of sexual activities, or different positions. Using a bedroom accessory can be pleasurable and involves little physical exertion. Try using a bedroom accessory on yourself or have your partner use it with you. Move the toy around to different parts of your body to find new pleasurable spots. This is a great way to experiment with new types of stimulation.

It is possible for people to be intimate without being sexual, such as holding hands or cuddling. Remember that sexuality and intimacy are self-defined. Determine what is important to you and what works for you; you and your partner determine what is "normal" for yourselves.

Many people with chronic pain find it helpful to be intimate during a time of day when they experience the least amount of pain. Keep a journal of your pain, when you experience it, what may cause you pain, and how you deal with the pain. This can help you determine the best time of day for intimacy, as well as how to help control the pain during sexual activities. If you find that a pain medication is causing sexual side effects, try taking the medicine well in advance of intimate activities. It might also be helpful to remember that hormones released during intimate activities can actually make your body feel better; the endorphins are natural painkillers and can help make you feel closer to your partner.

Certain medications may be useful for helping to cope with chronic pain as a way to improve sexuality, such as pain medication. Discuss this option with your health care provider.





## What products does Pure Romance offer to help improve my sexuality?

If you find that you have a decreased libido or have a more difficult time reaching orgasm than before, you may want to try an arousal cream, such as Ex-T-Cee, Nympho Niagra, or X-Scream (which can be used by both men and women). It is also important to use a water-based vaginal lubricant each time you engage in sexual activity, which can help with vaginal dryness. Try Just Like Me or Sweet Seduction, which are both gentle and non-irritating. If you find that a water-based lubricant is not enough to help with vaginal dryness, try a vaginal moisturizer, such as Fresh Start, which is estrogen-free and very gentle. You can also get other product recommendations from your Pure Romance Consultant or by visiting our Web site.

