

**Part Two**  
**Common problems in people aging with HIV**

**Chapter 11**  
**Sexual Health**

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**Section I. Sexual health and its importance**

**11-1. Why might people aging with HIV have sexual problems?**

People go through changes in sexual function as they age. These changes can cause a strain on your sex life. They can happen to anyone, including people with HIV.

- a. *Decreased sex hormones:* As people age, their sex hormones decrease. With decreased sex hormones, people take longer to get aroused and achieve orgasm. Men may take longer to become erect. Women may have vaginal dryness. These changes can make sex more difficult.
- b. *Age-related illness:* Many age-related diseases can limit your sexual activity. For example, arthritis (disease that causes pain in joints) can make it difficult to get into sexual positions. Heart disease can make it tiring to have sex.

**11-2. Why is a healthy sex life important?**

Good sex can help you relax and gives you pleasure. A healthy sex life can strengthen social ties by creating trust and closeness with your partner.

**Section II. Sexual health: what to do with your doctor**

**11-3. Tell your doctor about your sexual habits**

Your doctors may not ask you about sex. People often assume that adults do not have sex or risky sexual behaviors. Do not wait for your doctors to ask. Let your doctors know about your sexual habits and concerns. This way, if there is anything you need to do to keep healthy, you can discuss it in a timely manner.

#### **11-4. Ask if your sexual problems may be a side effect of your pills**

Some pills can dampen sexual desire or response. Ask if any of your pills can cause sexual problems. See if you can switch to a pill with fewer side effects.

#### **11-5. Ask your doctor about preexposure prophylaxis (PrEP)**

PrEP is for people without HIV. It reduces the risk of getting HIV from an infected partner. However, it is not 100% protective and must be used with safe sex practices. Ask your doctor if PrEP might be right for you or your partner.

### **Section III. Sexual Health: what to do on your own**

#### **11-6. Take pills correctly**

When other diseases are not controlled, you may feel too ill to enjoy sex. Keep diseases under control by taking the right amount of pills at the right time of day. This is very important for PrEP. People without HIV must take PrEP every day to be protected. You can get HIV even with just one missed dose of PrEP. If taking the right pills is difficult, use a pillbox or ask someone to remind you.

#### **11-7. Always practice safe sex**

Always use condoms. Condoms protect you from sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and prevent the spread of HIV to other people. You must use condoms even with PrEP, since PrEP cannot prevent the spread of HIV 100% of the time.

#### **11-8. Look forward not back**

As you age, it might not be possible to get back to the sexual function you had in your 20s. Instead, try to make the best of your sexual function today. For example, enjoy the freedom from unwanted pregnancy that comes with menopause. Do not focus on not being able to have more children. If you need help with how to make the most of your sexual function today, ask your doctor or see a sex specialist.

#### **11-9. Talk with your partner**

Talking with your partner is the key to a healthy sex life. Be honest about what you need and how you feel. Help your partner do the same by listening to their needs and feelings. Talking will help create a sexu