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**SEXUAL ACTIVITY AND HEART DISEASE OR STROKE**

Heart disease, a heart attack or stroke does not mean that you cannot or should not enjoy sexual activity. In most cases, patients can resume normal sexual activity as soon as they feel ready. In each case, you should discuss your specific circumstances with your doctor.

Psychological factors often affect the sexual activity of patients after heart disease or stroke. Depression and "performance anxiety" are two psychological factors that impact a patient's ability to enjoy his or her sex life. They can affect both interest and the ability to perform.

Depression is a common occurrence for recovering heart patients. This is normal, and usually disappears quickly (within about 3 months in 85% of cases). Depression can have a drastic impact on interest in sexual activities. It is important to remember that these feelings are normal and are temporary in most cases.

**The American Heart Association recommends the following guidelines for couples resuming sexual activity after recovery:**

- Choose a time when you are rested, relaxed and free from the stressful feelings brought on by the day's schedules and responsibilities.
- Wait one to three hours after eating a full meal, so that digestion can take place.
- Select a familiar, peaceful setting that is free from interruptions.
- Take medicine prior to sexual relations if prescribed by your doctor.

for stroke survivors resuming sex:

- Be aware that your feelings about your body may have changed since your brain attack.
- Try using pillows to help support your affected side during lovemaking.

**An important note about Viagra and heart disease:**

Viagra is a drug used to treat impotence. It works extremely well in most cases, but has serious side effects for men taking certain medications, including nitrates. Men who take or need nitroglycerin or nitrates, in any form (pill, under the

tongue, paste, injection, or amyl nitrate ampules), should not use this treatment for impotence. If you are a heart patient, even if you do not take nitroglycerine regularly, the physical effort associated with intercourse could result in chest pain (angina). If you were to develop chest pain while taking viagra, the use of nitroglycerine could lower your blood pressure to dangerous levels producing shock or death. Ask if you are not sure if you are taking a nitroglycerin or nitrate preparations for your heart. There are other treatment options available for men who take nitroglycerin or nitrates. At this time, no other treatment for problems with erections should be used simultaneously with Viagra until further testing shows the safety of multiple drug combinations.