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# Strategies to Improve the Care of MS in Women



## Sexual Dysfunction

### OVERVIEW

Sexual dysfunction is when physical or psychological factors interfere with sexual interest, activity, and satisfaction. Sexual dysfunction is common and usually transient, but can have a significant impact on relationships and quality of life. Physical illness such as diabetes or neuropathy, surgery, medication side effects, and injury can interfere with sexual activity. Emotional stress, depression, childbirth, and parenting responsibility also can impact sexual relations. Painful intercourse is most often experienced by women while men are prone to erectile dysfunction.

### RELEVANCE FOR MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Approximately 70% of patients with MS experience sexual dysfunction at some time but it is rarely discussed during office visits. Sexual dysfunction associated with MS can be divided into three categories.

- Direct result of the disease (genital numbness, decreased sex drive, reduced ability to climax/orgasm)
- Other symptoms of MS (fatigue, bowel and bladder problems, tremors, muscle spasm and pain)
- Emotional factors (fear of rejection, fear of transmitting the disease, decreased confidence)

Knowing the type of dysfunction is the first step in addressing the problem. Fill out the following checklist and bring it to your next appointment to help the discussion with your provider.

### ABOUT YOU

Over the past 6 months, which of the following symptoms have interfered with your sexual activity or satisfaction?  
(check all that apply)

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muscle tightness or spasms in my arms, legs or body           | <input type="checkbox"/> Problems with concentration, memory or thinking     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bladder or urinary symptoms                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Exacerbation or significant worsening of my MS      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bowel symptoms  | <input type="checkbox"/> Less feeling or numbness in the genitals            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feelings of dependency because of MS                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Fear of being rejected sexually due to MS           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tremors or shaking in my hands or body                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Worries about sexually satisfying my partner        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pain, burning or discomfort in my body                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling less confident about my sexuality due to MS |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling that my body is less attractive                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of sexual interest or desire                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problems moving my body the way I want during sexual activity | <input type="checkbox"/> Less intense or pleasurable orgasms or climaxes     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling less feminine due to MS                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Takes too long to orgasm or climax                  |
|  | <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate vaginal wetness or lubrication           |

### RESOURCES

**MSISQ:** [www.med-iq.com/files/noncme/material/pdfs/MSISQ-191.pdf](http://www.med-iq.com/files/noncme/material/pdfs/MSISQ-191.pdf)

**National MS Society:** <http://www.nationalmssociety.org/Symptoms-Diagnosis/MS-Symptoms/Sexual-Dysfunction>

**US Department of Veterans Affairs:**

[http://www.va.gov/MS/Veterans/symptom\\_management/Sexual\\_Dysfunction\\_and\\_Multiple\\_Sclerosis.asp](http://www.va.gov/MS/Veterans/symptom_management/Sexual_Dysfunction_and_Multiple_Sclerosis.asp)