



Sex & Sexuality after TBI

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Sex & Sexuality after TBI

- What are the challenges
- Why these are challenges
- What to do about it
- Discussion and questions



What is Sexuality?

- Physical
- Psychological
- Social



Prevalence of sexual problems

- 36-54 % of people with TBI
- Twice that of non-injured people



Sex begins in the brain

- Orbitofrontal & anterior frontal gyrus
- Lateral frontal cortex
- Inferior parietal lobule (left)
- Temporo-occipital cortex
- Anterior cingulate and medial frontal cortex
- Oarahippocampal gyrus & hippocampal gyrus
- Insula & claustrum
- Amygdala
- Hypothalamus
- Thalamus
- Nucleus accumbens
- Caudate
- Mesodiencephalic tegmentum
- Cerebellum

From Rees, Fowler & Maas, 2007



Causes of Sexual Problems

- Direct damage to brain
- Changes in mood/depression
- Personality changes
- Fatigue
- Pain
- Medication side effects



Types of Sexual Problems

- Physical
- Psychological
- Social



Types of Problems: Physical

- Problems with erection
- Vaginal dryness/discomfort during intercourse
- Problems with orgasm
- Low desire
- Fatigue
- Pain
- Medication side effects



Types of Problems: Psychological

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low self-esteem
- Body Image
- Feelings of
attractiveness/unattractiveness



Types of problems: Social

- Communication
- Role changes
- Lack of partner
- Inappropriate sexual behavior



What to do? Physical

- Medical workup
- Review medications
- Explore variety of sexual activities



What to do? Pain/Fatigue

- Medication review
- Energy conservation
- Positions
- Timing



What to do? Low desire

- Medical workup
- Explore what might put you “in the mood” (candle light, warm bath, massage, sex toys, erotic videos or magazines)
- Explore other activities that promote intimacy



Variety of sexual activities

- Masturbation/self-pleasuring
- Massage
- Kissing, hugging
- Using hands to stimulate partner
- Using mouth to stimulate partner (oral sex)
- Intercourse
- Use of pleasuring devices (vibrator, etc.)
- Use of video or print material



What to do? Psychological

- Psychotherapy for anxiety/depression
- Increase pleasure/social activity
- Choose activities/people that are reinforcing



What to do: Social

- Improve communication with partner
- Work on emotional intimacy
- Talk about the problem and possible solutions with an open mind
- Consider couples counseling



What to do: Social

- Work on friendships first
- Ask trusted others for feedback



Other important issues

- Sexual responsibility
- Sexual assault: self-protection
- Safer sex: condoms
- Contraception



Take home messages

- Sexuality is an important aspect of function
- Talk to medical providers about problems
- Be open/flexible; try new things
- Talk to your partner
- Be patient