

# How do I talk to my healthcare provider about sexual issues?

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Research has shown that people who maintain open and honest communication with their doctor tend to be more satisfied with the care they receive. However, some conversations are more difficult to approach than others.

Sensitive topics like sexuality, intimacy, body image, and arousal are intensely personal by nature. Add Parkinson’s disease on top of that, and you have an even more complex situation to discuss. There is a balance that can be found. On one hand, you don’t have to share all your private details when you share your concerns about sexual health with your doctor. While on the other hand, finding ways that work for you to talk about issues can help improve your sexual recovery and quality of life.

Sure, sexuality is a very big part of who we are as human beings, whether we openly talk about it or not. But sexuality is also an important part of your overall health. Regardless of what doctor you choose, make sure they are well-informed about the sexual problems that Parkinson’s disease may cause. Here’s an example of an opening question to ask your doctor:

[“I have questions about my sexual health now that I have Parkinson’s. Can I discuss them with you, or is there someone else you could recommend?”](#)

You may also consider contacting a mental health professional trained in sex therapy. They could work with your medical doctor to deal with the emotional side of the problem or to help with sexual communication. You have the right to have access to resources and information from your healthcare providers on how to improve your sexual health.

<b>Common issues for men</b>	<b>Common issues for women</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty moving</li><li>• Challenges showing feelings on one’s face</li><li>• Low sex drive</li><li>• Erectile dysfunction</li><li>• Difficulty coming to orgasm</li><li>• Realistic expectations about how your erectile function will evolve</li><li>• Possibility of bowel or urine leaks during sex</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Difficulty moving</li><li>• Challenges showing feelings on one’s face</li><li>• Low sex drive</li><li>• Poor vaginal lubrication</li><li>• Difficulty coming to orgasm</li><li>• Possibility of bowel or urine leaks during sex</li></ul>

## **Strategies for Speaking with a Healthcare Provider about Sexual Issues**

### **Choose which specialist to confide in.**

Do you prefer familiarity or anonymity? Deciding this can help determine which doctor you choose to approach with questions and concerns.

- A primary care physician (PCP) can offer familiarity that can comfort some. If that's you, maybe your PCP is a good place to start.
- Perhaps it's easier for you to discuss sexual issues with a specialist you don't know as well. You can ask your doctor's office or insurance company for a qualified list.
- With Parkinson's disease, you may be in more regular contact and have a good working relationship with your neurologist.

Regardless of which doctor you choose to discuss your concerns with, the sooner you reach out, the better. They are qualified to hear and respond to your concerns or to make recommendations.

### **Set goals for the conversation.**

Before the discussion, think about the outcome you're seeking. Remember, recovery takes time, patience, and consistency. Don't set yourself up for disappointment by having your goal be making your symptoms disappear instantly. Maybe, instead, you could set a few **reasonable goals for the conversation**, such as listing your top three concerns and what you've done already. Then, work with your doctor to determine a plan to address the gaps in seeing results.

### **Don't expect the healthcare provider to read your mind.**

As a specialist, your doctor understands how to read and treat symptoms. But, even if your doctor has seen you several times and is very informed of your situation, they can't know what's on your mind. Don't assume your specific questions will come up.

- Be **your own advocate** by preparing a list ahead of time.
- If your doctor doesn't seem to be helpful, **don't give up**.
- Check with your health insurance provider **what other resources are available** to you.

### **State your concerns clearly.**

Start the conversation with clear statements and include as much information as possible, such as, "I am concerned about my sex drive/ED/pain with intercourse."

### **Determine your long-term goals in terms of sexual intimacy.**

Let your healthcare provider know your long-term goals in terms of sexual intimacy and whether or not these include intercourse, non-penetrative sex, etc. Ensure that your goals and preferences are aligned with those of your partner.