

ENJOYING SEX WHEN YOU'RE LESS PHYSICALLY ABLE

Having a brachial plexus injury doesn't mean you can't have a good sex life but you may need to make a few adjustments to make things as enjoyable as possible. Changes to the appearance and function of your upper limb may affect your life in many ways:

Body Image

We all think about how we look, from childhood, and have thoughts and feelings about our shape, size and other physical attributes. Our body image changes as we go through life and can suffer even more after an injury - we not only have to deal with changes in how our body works and feels but also how it looks. Here are some ideas of things you can do:

- Know that you are still the same person inside that you were before your injury. It may help to think of yourself as a whole person who just happens to have a faulty body part.
- Focus on learning new ways to do things you enjoyed before...but sometimes you may need to be extra clever or creative!

Relationships

We can be very close to some people and just friends with others but they nearly always improve the quality of our lives. Some people avoid relationships because they are worried about body image and think other people won't like them. They may fear rejection and stay away from friends, relatives, and even strangers...but this fear is seldom justified. Relationships help make us feel whole - both emotionally and physically, but this does not mean you always have to be part of a crowd. Here are some ways to have healthy relationships:

- Stay involved with people you already know and share feelings for.
- Talk to family/partners/friends about your feelings.
- Ask your GP regarding a counselling appointment with a qualified counsellor.

Sexuality

This refers to the ways we express loving feelings and emotions. Our whole body responds to sexual attraction - this includes feelings of arousal (expressed by touching, kissing and caressing) as well as sexual intercourse. Touching and being touched are basic human needs.

Some people say that their limb injury limits their sexuality; this can be due to a negative body image. It can also be because people fear they will be rejected by their spouse or partner. It is important that you talk together about how your changed body looks, feels, and works. Talking about this can help prevent any misunderstanding or hurt feelings. Here are some things you can do:

- Focus only on the sensations of pleasure that you feel at the moment. Do not keep thinking about how you want to perform.
- Alternate between focusing on your partner's pleasure and your own sensations of arousal.
- Give yourself permission to try new ways of being sexual. You may need to find new and more comfortable positions e.g. add some pillows if you have problems with balance.
- Explore and enjoy finding out ways that work best for you and your partner. This will help with your body-image, relationships, and sexuality.