Everything You Wanted to Know About Sex After Brain Injury But Were Afraid to Ask

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Family Support Service
What I hope you will get out of today’s talk...

- Enhanced insight into the effects of ABI on sexuality and intimacy
- Increased comfort in addressing sexuality issues with clients & families
- Introduction to biopsychosocial model of assessment and intervention
- Resource information
Warm-up

- Sexual health - important part of rehab
- Comfortable answering questions
- Comfortable initiating discussions
- Feel knowledgeable about ABI & sexuality
- Comfortable addressing a range of sexual practices and beliefs (i.e. homosexuality, sex workers, sex toys, pornography)
- Regularly assess client’s sexual health needs
sextherapist?

nurse?

psychologist?

physiotherapist?

occupational therapist?

social worker?

behavior therapist?
Why Talk About Sexuality

- An extremely important area of our lives
- Sexuality changes are common after a brain injury
- An area of our lives that is often not talked about or addressed in rehab
- Societal attitudes towards sexual issues for people with disabilities
Our Brains - The Ultimate Sex Organ!
Is there a difference between Sex, Sexuality, and Intimacy?
Dimensions of Intimacy

- Aesthetic
- Commitment
- Creative
- Emotional
- Recreational
- Work

- Conflict
- Crisis
- Intellectual
- Sexual
- Spiritual

COMMUNICATION
What is Sexuality?

- Being male or female
- How we feel about ourselves
- Roles we play in society
- Reproduction
- How we behave physically, emotionally, socially, spiritually
- WHO WE ARE versus WHAT WE DO
Is there a difference between male and female brains??
THE FEMALE BRAIN

FOOTNOTE: The "Put Oil into the Car" and "Be Quite During the Game" glands are active only when the "SHINY THINGS AND DIAMONDS" OLFactory has been satisfied or when there is a shoe sale.
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THE MALE BRAIN

CROTCH SCANNING AREA

BALL SPORTS DANGEROUS PURSUITS

TOILET AIMING CELL

DOMESTIC SKILLS

T.V. AND REMOTE CONTROL ADDICTION CENTRE

SEX

SEX

LISTENING PARTICLE

ABILITY TO DRIVE MANUAL TRANSMISSION

ATTENTION SPAN

“AVOID PERSONAL QUESTIONS AT ALL COSTS” AREA

LAME EXCUSES GLAND

IRONING

FOOTNOTE: the “Listening to children cry in the middle of the night” gland is not shown due to it’s small and underdeveloped nature. Best viewed under a microscope.
Common Sexual Problems in Men with Brain Injury

- Decreased libido 57%
- Erectile dysfunction 57%
- Decreased frequency 62%
- Orgasmic dysfunction 33%
- Decreased self esteem 67%
- Decreased sex appeal 52%
- Increased depression 71%

(Zasler & Kreutzer, 1989)
Female Sexual Problems After Brain Injury

- Menstrual changes
- Changes in desire
- Diminished interest
- Arousal problems
- Orgasmic difficulties
- Fertility problems
Sexual Problems After TBI
RTC Study

• Compared 322 individuals with TBI and 264 with no disability (ND)
• Ages 16 - 85 (mean age 38 years)
• Equal number females & males
• TBI group - average 9 years post-injury

(Hibbard et al, 2000)
### Males in RTC Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>TBI</th>
<th>ND</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex in past year</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>85%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meaningful relationship</td>
<td>&lt;50%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of sex (# of sexual problems)</td>
<td>1-2</td>
<td>0-1</td>
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</table>
Problems Reported by Males With TBI

- Inadequate energy for sex
- Low sex drive
- Problems initiating sex
- Problems reaching orgasm
- Maintaining erection
- Body positioning & movement
- Decreased sensation
Predictors of Sexual Problems in Men

- Being depressed
- Being older and having a TBI
### Females in RTC Study

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<td>Meaningful relationship</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of sex</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>0-1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(# of sexual problems)</td>
<td></td>
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</table>

Problems Reported by Females With TBI

- Inadequate energy for sex
- Low sex drive
- Problems with initiation & arousal
- Painful sex & inability to masturbate
- Problems with orgasm & lubrication
- Discomfort in positioning
- Decreased sensation
Predictors of Sexual Problems in Females

- Being depressed
- Having endocrine/hormonal problems
- Being older and having a TBI
Biopsychosocial Model of Sexuality

Neuropsychological & Psychological Effects

Sexuality

Medical & Physical Issues

Relationship Changes
Neuropsychological and Psychological Factors

adjustment & loss issues

cognitive changes

depression & anxiety

personality changes

behavior (apathy - disinhibition)

language & communication
Medical/Physical Issues

- sensory changes
- motor function
- changes in oral function
- hormonal changes
- urogenital problems
- fatigue
- reduced endurance

- seizures
- medication effects
- alcohol use
- normal aging
- pain
Medication Side Effects

- Anticonvulsants – impotence, ↓ libido, ejaculatory difficulties, arousal problems, effect on oral contraceptives
- SSRI’s – ↓ libido, orgasmic, erectile & ejaculatory difficulties
- Stimulants – ↓ libido, impotence, orgasmic & ejaculatory difficulties
- Antipsychotics – anorgasmia, priapism, painful ejaculation
- Antihypertensives - ↓ libido & sexual response
Relationship Factors
In a recent Harris on-line poll, 38,562 men across Canada were asked to identify a woman’s ultimate fantasy. 97.8% of the respondents said that a woman’s ultimate fantasy is to have two men at once. While this has been verified by a recent sociological study, it appears that most men do not realize that in this fantasy, one man is cooking and the other is cleaning.
Relationship Issues

- role changes
- decreased intimacy
- changed personality
- behavior

- loss
- decreased affection
- communication difficulties
- caregiver strain
Alternatives to intercourse?
cuddling closeness

COMMUNICATION
caring
Being Single, Happy & Sexual

- Legitimize need to be sexual being
- Meeting people & learning to date
- Explaining ABI to others
- Alternative forms of sexual expression
- Valuing unique sexual abilities
- Maintaining self esteem & safety
Adolescents with ABI

- Early or late sexual development
- Social & dating skills not well developed
- Limited life & sexual experience
- Self image, self esteem & peer acceptance
- Disinhibition & surging hormones
- Safety concerns (judgment, impulsivity)
- Struggle for independence
Sexuality, Safety & Smarts

A workshop about sexuality & relationships after brain injury - For youth with ABI & their parents
Workshop Components

- Sexuality & ABI
- Public versus private behaviors
- Age of consent
- Dating & healthy relationships
- Maintaining safety & STI’s
- Internet safety
- Resources
Family intervention

• Talking about sexuality – why, when, what, how?
• Education & information
• Balance protectiveness with letting go
• Support teen’s developing sexuality
• Teach coping & negotiation skills
• Promote self esteem & foster peer connections
PLISSIT Model

- Permission
- Limited Information
- Specific Suggestions
- Intensive Therapy

- Education
- Counselling (Brief Therapy)
- Therapy (Intensive Therapy)

(Annon, 1975)
Goals of Intervention

- Acknowledge sexuality
- Provide information
- Assess needs
- Teach coping skills
- Redefine sexuality
- Maintain safety
- Link to resources

When will my sex life get back to normal?
Absence of sensation does not mean absence of feelings.

Inability to move does not mean inability to please.

Presence of deficits does not mean the absence of desire.

Inability to perform does not mean inability to enjoy.

(Haseltine, Cole, & Gray, 1993)
Sex doesn't end after brain injury.... it just changes.
Thank You!
REFERENCES


Simpson, G. (1999) You and Me. An education program about sex and sexuality after traumatic brain injury. Sydney: Brain Injury Rehabilitation Unit. E-mail: grahame.simpson@swsahs.nws.gov.au


WEBSITES

www.spiderbytes.ca – Planned Parenthood of Toronto
www.planetahead.ca – Vancouver Coastal Health Authority
www.positive.org – myths, sexual expression, STI’s, safer sex
www.sexualityandu.ca – sexual health information for teens, adults, parents, & health care professionals
www.familiesaretalking.org – tools for families to talk about sexuality issues
www.sieccan.org – Sex Information & Education Council of Canada
www.teachingsexualhealth.ca – Calgary Health Region & Alberta Society for Promotion of Sexual Health
www.sexualhealth.com - Sexual Health Network
www.comeasyouare.com - store that is disability friendly
www.siecus.org - Sex Information & Education Council of the U.S.
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