INTIMACY & HEART DISEASE

Center for Cardiac Fitness
Cardiac Rehab Program
The Miriam Hospital

TMH Cardiac Rehabilitation Education Program
CONCERNS

- Sex will cause another heart attack
- Reduced sexual drive/functioning
- Partner’s fears
- Talking to doctors about sex
MYTHS

- Sex is never safe after a cardiac event
- Sex is not important to older adults
INTIMACY IS IMPORTANT

- Intimate relationships involve affection, trust, and closeness

- Intimacy can include physical contact of a sexual nature, but can also be expressed in other ways

- Intimate relationships can be protective against the harmful effects of stress
PHYSICAL EXERTION OF SEX

- Exertion is similar as mild to moderate intensity exercise
- BP and HR briefly increase during intercourse and quickly return to baseline
- Special circumstances increase strain
  - New partners, new locations
  - Following heavy meal or alcohol
  - Certain positions – on top, lying flat
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>METs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Walking at 2 mph, level ground</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking at 3 mph, level ground</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preorgasmic sexual activity</td>
<td>2-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orgasm</td>
<td>3-4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cycling at 10 miles per hour</td>
<td>6-7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Walking on treadmill during stress test, 12 minutes up to 4 mph with incline</td>
<td>10-13</td>
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IMPAIRED SEXUAL FUNCTIONING

- Medication side effects
  - Diuretics, BP meds, antiarrhythmics, anti-angina, cholesterol, antidepressants
- Medical illness and recovery
- Depression
- Fear or worries
- Body image concerns/self-esteem
TREATMENTS

- Medications (Viagra, Cialis, Levitra)
  - Not for everyone!
- Vacuum pump
- Suppositories, implants
- Moisturizers, lubricants (Replens, K-Y)
- Sex therapy, couples therapy, and/or psychotherapy
TALKING WITH YOUR DOCTOR

- Be assertive
- Introduce at beginning
- Ask other providers
PARTNERS’ FEARS

- Normal reaction
- Communication
- Patience
MAINTAINING INTIMACY

- Talk about your feelings
- Participate in common activities
- Make alone time and go slowly
- Experiment with alternative sexual techniques
- Have fun and don’t put too much pressure on each other
OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

- Increase overall strength
- Don’t wear restrictive clothing
- Healthy lifestyle
- Diabetes
- Intimacy— not just sex!
3 KEY POINTS

- Seek information
- Communication
- Patience