

Older Men Become Sexually More Like Women

By Michael Castleman

Summary

Young men become sexually aroused very quickly, without effort. Meanwhile, young women often complain that they have trouble becoming aroused—which young men find inconceivable.

But as men age beyond 40, instant arousal fades. It takes more effort—and relaxed, playful lovemaking—for them to become fully aroused. In other words, older men become more like women.

Young men tend to be very focused on the genitals. Young women generally prefer whole-body sensuality. As men age, they generally come to appreciate leisurely, playful, whole-body sensuality. They become more like women.

Young men tend to be preoccupied with intercourse. Meanwhile, young women prefer whole-body sensuality. After 40, erection changes make intercourse more problematic for men, and most become more interested in the non-intercourse aspects of lovemaking. They become more like women.

In other words, compared with couples under 40, older couples tend to be more in synch sexually. This can enhance intimacy and lead to better sex. In fact, older couples can have more fulfilling sex at 65 than they had at 25.

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All the press about the sexuality of older men focuses on erection problems, and the drugs now available to treat them. But another equally important issue has received almost no attention—the problems men over 40 have becoming sexually aroused in the first place.

Most Young Men: Instant Arousal

An old joke asks: What single word can a woman say to sexually arouse a man? Answer: Hello. This joke needs to be revised. The question should specify *young* men, those under 40 or so. From the teen years into the forties, arousal is not an issue for most men. Many men feel almost perpetually aroused, and a sexual thought or the sight of an attractive woman or an erotic image is all it takes to start developing an erection.

Most Young Women: Arousal Takes Time and Effort

While instant arousal is the rule for young men, the same cannot be said for young women. Many young women complain that they have difficulty becoming aroused. When they say this, most men, especially young men, have no idea what they're talking about. Trouble getting turned on? How can that be? I'm aroused most of the time.

As time passes, as young women become more comfortable with sex and who they are sexually, they learn what turns them on, and arousal problems usually subside (but remain an issue for quite a few). Many women over 30 continue to talk about the "work" involved in sex, the "effort" it takes to become aroused enough to enjoy sex and express orgasm.

What does this effort involve? Women say they must consciously clear their minds of distractions and focus on fantasies that turn them on. They also say they need considerable leisurely, playful, whole-body massage—often with sex toys—to feel warmed enough to enjoy genital play and full arousal. Again, until men are in their 40s, they find this hard to believe. Work to get turned on? You must be kidding. It's no work at all. This attitude is part of the reason why some men resist women's requests for extended whole-body sensuality before genital play. Many women *absolutely require* this to become aroused. But it makes no sense to young men, for whom sexual arousal is effortless.

Older Men: Arousal Takes Time and Effort

After around 40, men's sexuality changes. Testosterone production gradually falls, so men's sex drive becomes tempered. They mellow. They don't feel the same urgent need for sex that they experienced in their twenties. This change requires a major adjustment. But it also creates an opportunity to explore sex that's less preoccupied with the genitals. Some men focus on what they've lost—perpetual

arousal, reliable erections, and the primacy of intercourse. But others focus on what they can gain, pleasure that expands from the genitals to the whole body.

As men grow older, they can still become aroused, but things are not like they once were. For some men, arousal changes begin as early as 40, for others, the late forties, for others around fifty, for a few, later. For some, the process is gradual, for others, more sudden. But whenever and however it happens, at a certain point, men over 40 realize that sexual arousal, something they took for granted for so long, is no longer automatic. Now it takes concentration, effort.

As arousal becomes an issue, many men find that it takes longer to raise erections during masturbation. It can take even longer during partner sex and sometimes it might not happen. In addition, all of a sudden, minor distractions that would have had no sexual effect a decade or two earlier—a loud motorcycle roaring up the street, thoughts of job tasks, etc.—now weaken arousal and lead to erection wilting, even in the presence of a naked woman whom the man loves, feels excited by, and who responds enthusiastically to lovemaking.

As older men develop arousal difficulties, the change can feel immensely disconcerting. After decades of becoming effortlessly aroused—often with women criticizing how horny they are all the time—instant arousal and taken-for-granted sexual function become things of the past. Hence an old saying: What young men want to do all night takes older men all night to do.

Why? No one really knows, but evolutionary biology offers a plausible explanation. The biological purpose of life is to reproduce life. Early humans were not long-lived. Our prehistoric ancestors were elders at 40 and ancient if they survived to 50. In other words, men evolved to function well sexually only until what today is considered early middle age. Modern nutrition and medicine have almost doubled the human lifespan of 100,000 years ago. They have also extended the duration of sexual function. But even robustly healthy 50 year olds no longer have a nervous system that's as easily sexually excitable as it was in their 20s. That's just how it is.

Erection Drugs Don't Help with Arousal

Most men equate arousal with erection. If I'm aroused, I get hard. If I get hard, I must be aroused. As a result, when arousal becomes an issue, many men's first thought is: I must have an erection problem. Given the equation between arousal and erection in most men's minds, and the publicity about erection medications, this is a reasonable conclusion. So they get a prescription. But the market for

erection medications has fallen far short of what was once predicted. Only half of men who get a prescription for erection drugs refill it, and most men don't get a first prescription.

Why? Largely because erection medications have been over-hyped. They just don't work as well as many men imagine they will. While erection drugs coax a statistically significant amount of extra blood into the penis, they do not produce the rock-hard erections men recall from their youth, or see in pornography. As a result, despite Viagra, Cialis, and Levitra, many men continue to experience less firmness, less ability to raise erections, and greater likelihood of erections wilting because of minor distractions.

While these issues relate to erection, they have as much to do with arousal. But erection drugs have *no effect* on arousal, none. All they do is increase blood flow into the penis. They are not aphrodisiacs. But many men think they are. When men try erection drugs but find it no easier to become aroused, they feel disappointed (or disgusted), and don't refill their prescriptions. Some withdraw from lovemaking altogether, convinced that they're sexually all washed up.

There is no research estimating the proportion of older men who give up on sex when arousal stops being automatic. But a review of Web sites with sex Q&A's reveals that many older women voice a complaint that is by no means rare, variations on: "My boyfriend/husband is over 40. He used to want sex all the time. But now he hardly wants it at all. What's wrong with me?" Women often blame *themselves* when their man turns off to sex. But for older men, the reason often has less to do with the woman than with the man's arousal problems—and lack of experience in the effort it takes to become aroused.

How Men Over 40 Become Sexually More Like Women

If erection drugs don't increase arousal, what does? The same things that allow women to become aroused: consciously clearing their minds of distractions, focusing on fantasies that turn them on, and lots of leisurely, playful, whole-body massage before genital play. The same approaches also help older men.

As men age, men's and women's sexual sensibilities converge. Men become sexually more like women. They need more time to become aroused, and as erection and intercourse become more problematic or impossible, whole-body sensuality becomes more attractive. Compared with young lovers, older couples are more sexually in synch. Couples who appreciate this can enjoy richer, more fulfilling sex at 65 than they had at 25.

Clearing the Mind. This is not easy for anyone. The mind has a way of remaining active with all sorts of unpredictable—and not-sexy—thoughts. To become sexually aroused, it's not necessary for older men to totally empty their minds. Stray thoughts always intrude. But it helps to take conscious steps out of your daily life and into the realm of eroticism. This takes effort, but without it, older men have difficulty becoming aroused.

- Minimize distractions.
- Relax.
- Take a shower either solo if you're masturbating, or with your lover.
- Set an erotic mood with soft lighting, perhaps candles, soft music, and if you're with a lover, lots of kissing and cuddling.

These are the kinds of approaches women often enjoy, and young men sometimes deride as unnecessary. But they are necessary for many, if not most women. They also become necessary for older men.

Focus on Hot Fantasies. Are you still running through the same old fantasies you used years ago? If so, chances are they're stale. Dream up some new ones. This also takes effort, but without fresh, hot fantasies, it's often difficult for older men to become aroused. Depicting new fantasies is one of the functions of pornography. The conventional wisdom is that men use porn as a masturbation aid. That's true. But it's also an *arousal* aid, a source of new fantasies.

Whole-Body Sensuality. According to leading sex therapists, leisurely, playful, massage-inspired, whole-body touch is a fundamental prerequisite for good sex. Many women absolutely need it to become aroused. Many young men wonder why. They find out after 40. Like women, older men *require* whole-body sensuality to become sexually aroused.

In other words, older men become sexually more like women. The transition is often disconcerting, indeed, painful for many men. Change is never easy, particularly when the changes involve men having work at becoming sexually aroused. But the effort allows men to enjoy lovemaking into old age, even as erection capacity declines. And it brings older men and women closer together. As men's arousal patterns become more similar to women's, lovers are more likely to enjoy sharing whole-body sensual pleasure.