Sexual wellbeing in COPD

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Overview

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• Causes
  o Physiological factors
  o Psychological factors
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• Talking about sexual wellbeing
• Interventions
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Introduction

• Sexual activity is an important part of life, identity and general wellbeing
• Many adults including older adults have sexually active lives
• However sexual activity/satisfaction can be influenced by poorer health and ageing
• COPD has been associated with higher rates of sexual dysfunction
Prevalence – Men

72-87% men with COPD have erectile dysfunction

Study by Collins et al (2012)
• 90 men
• Stable moderate to severe COPD
• 74% had at least one sexual problem
• In addition to erectile dysfunction
  o 37% lack of sexual interest
  o 42% unable to achieve orgasm
  o 28% lack of sexual pleasure
Prevalence - Women

• Little research into sexual dysfunction in women
• One study showed reduced sexual intimacy, however a very small study
Causes

- Lower testosterone in men with COPD
- Reduced exercise capacity and general deconditioning
- Shortness of breath related to positioning and activity
Causes - Psychological

- Beliefs that too old or too sick
- Feeling unattractive/loss of self esteem
- Fear and anxiety
- Depression
- With changing health status - unwillingness or unable to discuss sexual roles and relationship
Causes - Medication

• Some medications can contribute to sexual dysfunction, decreased sexual desire and/or performance
  o Betablockers, diuretics, antidepressants, antiepileptics, steroids
Talking about sex

- **PLISSIT** model
- **Permission** - letting patients and partners know it is acceptable and appropriate to ask questions/concerns about sex
- **Limited Information** - general information
- **Specific Suggestions** - interventions, advice positioning
- **Intensive Therapy** - referral
Interventions/Advice

• Cochrane Review – insufficient evidence on medical interventions to improve sexual dysfunction

Advice
• Improving exercise capacity
• Preparing for sex
• Breathing control and sputum clearance techniques
• Using inhalers
• Fatigue management
• Positioning
• Encouraging conversations
• Reminding that sex is not limited to intercourse
Interventions

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