



Hysterectomy Support
and Shared Experiences

Intimacy and Sex After Hysterectomy: Your Guide to Physical and Emotional Recovery

A comprehensive guide to navigating intimacy, hormones, and sexual wellness after hysterectomy

Your Concerns About Sex Are Completely Normal

First, it's important to know that worrying about your sex life after hysterectomy is incredibly common and completely understandable. Questions like "Will it feel the same?" "Will I still enjoy it?" "What if my desire disappears?" are some of the most frequent concerns I hear. You're not alone in having these fears, and it's important to address them openly and honestly.

The good news is that many people find their sex lives actually improve after hysterectomy once they've healed properly - especially if they were dealing with pain, heavy bleeding, or other symptoms before surgery.

Safety First: When Is It Safe to Resume Sexual Activity?

The Non-Negotiable Rule: Nothing Inside for AT LEAST 8 Weeks

The "nothing inside" for AT LEAST 8 weeks rule is absolutely firm, firm, firm. This is not a guideline - this is a medical requirement for your safety.

It is not uncommon to be on sexual restrictions for 8-12 weeks following your surgery. The risks of damage to dissolving sutures, not to mention infection, are too high. At that early stage of healing, the scar tissues are too stiff and inelastic to stretch without tearing.

Why this restriction is so important: If you open your cervical cuff (the area they have closed off at the top of your vagina, creating a pseudo-cervix that supports and closes the end) AT ALL, you've opened the whole contents of your abdomen to communication with the outside world (Big Yuck). Also, some will have suture ends in the vagina. If/when a partner comes in contact with these sharp ends, this can cause them some pain too.

Different Timelines for Different Surgeries

If you kept your cervix: Sex can sometimes be given the okay from about six weeks post-op, but it's not at all unusual to be advised to wait for 8-12 weeks before resuming sexual activity, and your doctor will advise you accordingly.

If your cervix was removed: You'll definitely need to wait the full healing period - typically 8-12 weeks minimum.

The bottom line: While it's normal to be worried about future sex and for it to be important to you, it is crucial that you are properly healed first. Don't feel pressured to rush - do what feels comfortable with you when you are ready.

Intimacy During Recovery: "Outercourse" Options

This does not mean that you can't have intimacy or "play" ahead of resuming full relations! In our community, we refer to it as "outercourse."

What's Safe During Recovery:

- **External touching and caressing**
- **Kissing and cuddling**
- **Breast stimulation**
- **External genital stimulation (for yourself)**
- **Non-penetrative activities with your partner**

What to Avoid:

- **Any vaginal penetration (fingers, toys, penis)**
- **Oral sex is not recommended until six weeks post-op due to infection risks**
- **Anything that could introduce bacteria to the healing vaginal area**

Testing Your Response Safely:

You can still test your response on your own, or with your partner, using non-penetrating/non-contaminating methods. Usually, it's good to ask your doctor when it is safe to experience an orgasm (which stresses all those internal sutures and healing points) and wait a bare minimum of at least four weeks before trying this, just to allow internal healing to get a good start.

Your First Times: What to Expect

Be Patient with Your Body

You will probably find that your body's responses take a little time and practice to feel normal again. Be patient with yourself as stress or anxiety can make this worse. If you don't get the response you expect the first time - wait a week and accept it as part of healing.

Practical Tips for Early Sexual Activity:

Use lubrication: It's always a good idea to use some lube the first few times - natural coconut oil is highly recommended by our community and there is also a brand called Sutil that is available online from a shop called Jo Divine that is EXCELLENT! It also doubles as a moisturiser and is natural. It's what I use every time because, I don't want anything nasty or irritating going near that area!!

Expect some adjustment: It's normal to feel a little crampy after those early orgasms as everything gets used to contracting again. Be gentle with yourself.

Take it slow: There's no rush. Let your body guide you on what feels comfortable.

Communicate: Talk openly with your partner about what feels good and what doesn't. It might take some trial and error to find what your new - new looks and feels like for you.

When to Seek Help:

If sex continues to be painful or difficult post-op, then please talk to your doctor. This could indicate healing issues that need attention, or you might benefit from pelvic floor therapy.

Understanding Hormonal Changes and Their Impact

If Your Ovaries Were Removed (Surgical Menopause)

This creates immediate menopause, which can significantly impact your sexual experience:

Physical changes you might experience:

- **Vaginal dryness due to decreased estrogen**
- **Thinning of vaginal tissues**
- **Decreased natural lubrication**
- **Changes in vaginal pH that can increase infection risk**
- **Hot flashes and night sweats affecting sleep and mood**

Impact on libido:

- **Testosterone (yes, women need it too!) also drops, affecting desire**
- **Estrogen decline can reduce blood flow to sexual organs**
- **Physical discomfort can create mental barriers to intimacy**

If Your Ovaries Were Kept

Even if your ovaries remain, you might experience some hormonal changes:

- **Temporary disruption from surgery stress**
- **Possible earlier onset of natural menopause**
- **Changes in hormone patterns during healing**

Managing Hormonal Impact on Sexuality

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT):

- Can significantly help with vaginal dryness and libido
- Available in systemic (whole body) or local (vaginal) forms
- Discuss benefits and risks with your doctor based on your health history
- May take several weeks to months to see full effects

Vaginal Estrogen:

- Lower doses than systemic HRT
- Directly treats vaginal dryness and tissue thinning
- Often considered safer for those who can't take systemic hormones
- Available as creams, tablets, or rings

Natural Approaches:

- Regular sexual activity (including self-stimulation) helps maintain tissue health
- Staying hydrated supports overall tissue health
- Some find certain supplements helpful (discuss with your doctor first). I am naturally weary of supplements because there is some rubbish out there so do your research.

When Libido is Low: Practical Strategies

Understanding Low Libido After Hysterectomy

Low libido is incredibly common after hysterectomy and can have multiple causes:

- Hormonal changes
- Physical discomfort or pain
- Emotional adjustment to body changes
- Fatigue during recovery
- Stress and anxiety
- Relationship dynamics

Strategies to Rebuild Desire

Physical approaches:

- Address pain or discomfort with your doctor
- Consider hormone therapy if appropriate
- Use high-quality lubricants regularly
- Practice pelvic floor exercises to improve blood flow and sexual function
- Consider pelvic floor physical therapy if you're experiencing pain or dysfunction
- Maintain overall health through diet and exercise

Emotional and mental approaches:

- Give yourself time to adjust - this is a major life change
- Practice self-compassion about changes in your body

- Communicate openly with your partner about your needs and concerns
- Consider counseling if you're struggling with body image or emotional adjustment

Relationship strategies:

- Focus on intimacy beyond sex - emotional connection is crucial
- Explore new ways to be intimate that feel good for you now
- Be honest about what you're experiencing
- Consider couples therapy if relationship stress is affecting intimacy

Practical tips:

- Schedule intimate time when you're least tired
- Create a comfortable, relaxing environment
- Focus on pleasure rather than performance
- Use fantasies, erotica, or other mental stimulation
- Consider whether medications you're taking might affect libido

Specific Challenges and Solutions

Vaginal Dryness

Solutions:

- Use lubricants every time (Sutil as mentioned earlier, water-based, silicone-based, or natural like coconut oil)
- Consider vaginal moisturizers for daily use
- Ask about vaginal estrogen therapy
- Stay sexually active to maintain tissue health

Pain During Intercourse

Possible causes:

- Insufficient healing time
- Scar tissue formation
- Vaginal tissue changes from hormone loss
- Pelvic floor muscle tension
- Pelvic floor dysfunction

Solutions:

- Ensure you're fully healed before attempting penetration
- Use plenty of lubrication
- Try different positions that give you more control
- Consider pelvic floor physical therapy - this is often incredibly effective for post-surgical pain
- Discuss with your doctor - there may be treatable causes

Loss of Sexual Sensation

What might help:

- Be patient - sensation can return gradually
- Explore different types of touch and stimulation
- Focus on mental arousal as well as physical
- Consider whether medications might be affecting sensation
- Discuss with your doctor about possible treatments

Partner Concerns

Common partner worries:

- Fear of hurting you
- Confusion about timeline and restrictions
- Feeling rejected if you're not interested in sex
- Not knowing how to be supportive

How to help:

- Include your partner in doctor conversations when appropriate
- Communicate openly about what you're experiencing
- Reassure them about the temporary nature of many changes
- Explore non-sexual intimacy together
- Consider couples counseling for additional support

The Crucial Role of Pelvic Floor Health

Why Pelvic Floor Health Matters After Hysterectomy

Your pelvic floor is a group of muscles that support your pelvic organs and play a crucial role in sexual function, bladder control, and overall pelvic health. After hysterectomy, maintaining good pelvic floor health becomes even more important.

How hysterectomy affects your pelvic floor:

- Surgery can cause temporary weakness or dysfunction
- Scar tissue formation can affect muscle function
- Changes in organ support can alter pelvic floor dynamics
- Hormonal changes can affect muscle tone and function

Pelvic Floor Problems That Can Affect Intimacy

Common post-hysterectomy pelvic floor issues:

- Pelvic floor tension or spasm - Can cause pain during penetration
- Weak pelvic floor muscles - May affect sensation and sexual response
- Overactive pelvic floor - Can cause pain and difficulty with intimacy

- Scar tissue restrictions - Can limit normal muscle movement and flexibility

Signs you might benefit from pelvic floor therapy:

- Pain during or after sexual activity
- Difficulty achieving orgasm or changes in sensation
- Feeling of incomplete bladder emptying
- Pelvic pressure or heaviness
- Lower back or hip pain
- Difficulty inserting tampons or having pelvic exams

The Power of Pelvic Floor Physical Therapy

Pelvic floor physical therapy can be transformative for sexual health after hysterectomy.

Many people don't realise that specialised physical therapists can help with:

- Pain management - Teaching muscle relaxation techniques
- Improving blood flow - Better circulation means better sexual response
- Scar tissue management - Manual therapy to improve tissue mobility
- Muscle retraining - Learning proper muscle coordination
- Desensitization techniques - Gradually reducing pain and fear responses

What to expect from pelvic floor PT:

- Comprehensive evaluation of your pelvic floor function
- Personalized treatment plan based on your specific needs
- Internal and external manual therapy techniques
- Exercise prescription tailored to your situation
- Education about your pelvic floor and sexual health

Pelvic Floor Exercises for Sexual Health

Benefits of regular pelvic floor exercises:

- Improved blood flow to sexual organs
- Better muscle tone and strength
- Enhanced sensation and sexual response
- Reduced risk of pelvic organ prolapse
- Better bladder and bowel control
- Improved confidence in your body

Important note: While basic Kegel exercises are helpful, it's crucial to do them correctly. Many people think they're doing pelvic floor exercises properly but aren't getting the full benefit.

When Professional Help Makes All the Difference

Consider pelvic floor physical therapy if you're experiencing:

- Any ongoing pain or discomfort
- Changes in sexual function or sensation
- Difficulty with intimacy after clearance from your doctor
- Bladder or bowel control issues
- Feeling like something isn't "right" with your pelvic area

The reality about access: Unfortunately, many people don't have easy access to specialised pelvic floor physical therapists, which can be frustrating when you need this type of care.

If you can't access in-person therapy: While professional treatment is ideal, learning proper pelvic floor care and exercises can still make a significant difference in your recovery and long-term sexual health.

We have a comprehensive Pelvic Floor Health course included in our membership that teaches you the fundamentals of caring for your pelvic floor, proper exercise techniques, and strategies for maintaining optimal pelvic health after hysterectomy. You can find the details on our website.

Long-Term Sexual Health After Hysterectomy

What Many People Experience Long-Term:

- **Improved sex life:** Many people find sex better after hysterectomy once they've healed, especially if they had painful conditions before
- **Different but good:** Some changes in sensation or response that are different but still pleasurable
- **Stronger relationships:** Going through this together can strengthen partnerships
- **Increased confidence:** Relief from previous symptoms can boost confidence and enjoyment

Maintaining Sexual Health:

- **Regular checkups:** Continue seeing your gynaecologist regularly
- **Stay sexually active:** Regular activity helps maintain tissue health
- **Keep communicating:** Your needs and responses may continue to evolve
- **Address problems early:** Don't suffer in silence if issues arise

Questions to Ask Your Healthcare Provider

About timing:

- "When is it safe for me to resume sexual activity?"
- "What signs should I watch for that indicate I'm not ready?"
- "When can I safely have an orgasm?"

About hormones:

- "How will my hormone levels be affected by this surgery?"

- "Am I a candidate for hormone replacement therapy?"
- "What are my options for managing vaginal dryness?"

About ongoing issues:

- "What should I do if sex is still painful after I'm cleared?"
- "How can I address low libido?"
- "Would pelvic floor physical therapy help my situation?"
- "Are there specialists who can help with sexual health after hysterectomy?"
- "What signs indicate I might have pelvic floor dysfunction?"

Remember: Your Recovery is Unique

Your recovery is unique to you - remember that everyone heals differently and everybody's libido and sexual response are very different. What works for someone else might not work for you, and that's completely normal.

Be patient with yourself: Sexual recovery often takes longer than physical healing. It's normal for it to take several months to a year to feel completely comfortable and confident again.

There's no "normal" timeline: Some people feel ready to resume sexual activity as soon as they're medically cleared, while others need more time emotionally and physically.

It's okay to grieve: If your sexual experience changes significantly, it's normal to feel sad about that loss, even if other aspects of your life improve.

The Bottom Line

Most people do return to satisfying sex lives after hysterectomy, though the journey might involve some adjustment. The key is patience, communication, proper medical care, and being kind to yourself during the process.

Remember:

- **Physical healing comes first - don't rush this**
- **Hormonal changes can be addressed with medical help**
- **Emotional adjustment takes time and that's normal**
- **Communication with partners is crucial**
- **Professional help is available if you need it**
- **Many people find their sex lives actually improve long-term**

You deserve to have a fulfilling intimate life after hysterectomy. Don't hesitate to seek help if you need it, and remember that this aspect of recovery, like all others, takes time and patience.

*If you're still feeling anxious, that's completely understandable. Consider discussing your concerns with a professional and joining our **Hysterectomy Support Hub** for ongoing*

support where you can connect with others who've been through this same experience. There are also HEAPS of resources and our courses there that will literally walk you through the whole journey and you get me (Kelly) in your pocket for any and all questions directly as well as regular in person group support calls.

You can find details about all of our hysterectomy support options on our website here: <https://www.hysterectomy-support.com>



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