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## **Sexuality and Relationships Change into Middle and Older Age: Patient Educational Handout**

As we age, our sexuality and relationships often change in ways we may not expect. Here are some common changes that occur in middle and older adulthood:

- Decreased hormone levels can lead to changes in libido, erectile function, lubrication, and ability to orgasm. These changes are normal, but managing symptoms through lubricants, medication, devices, or changes in sexual habits can help maintain an active sex life.
- The nature of long-term relationships often evolves from passion to companionship. Focusing on emotional intimacy, affection, and non-penetrative sexual activities can sustain fulfilling relationships.
- Dating dynamics shift due to life stage changes. Single older adults may struggle with finding partners, but being open to new ways of meeting people and being flexible in what defines a compatible partner can open possibilities.
- Exploring sexual fluidity becomes more common. Adults may discover same-sex attractions, gender-diverse identities, polyamorous relationships, kinks, or asexuality that were unrealized or hidden earlier in life. Accepting these evolutions as normal allows for more authentic living.
- Cultural and religious expectations around sexuality in older adulthood still exist but can be challenged. Prioritizing your own sexual well-being over social stigmas or outdated norms is empowering.
- Grief over lost youth, past relationships, or unmet sexual milestones is common. However, each life stage has unique opportunities for intimacy and sexual expression to embrace.

Remember, sexuality can remain an important element of overall well-being and quality of life at any age. Discussing concerns openly with your healthcare provider and partner(s) is the first step in maintaining an active and fulfilling sex life as you get older.