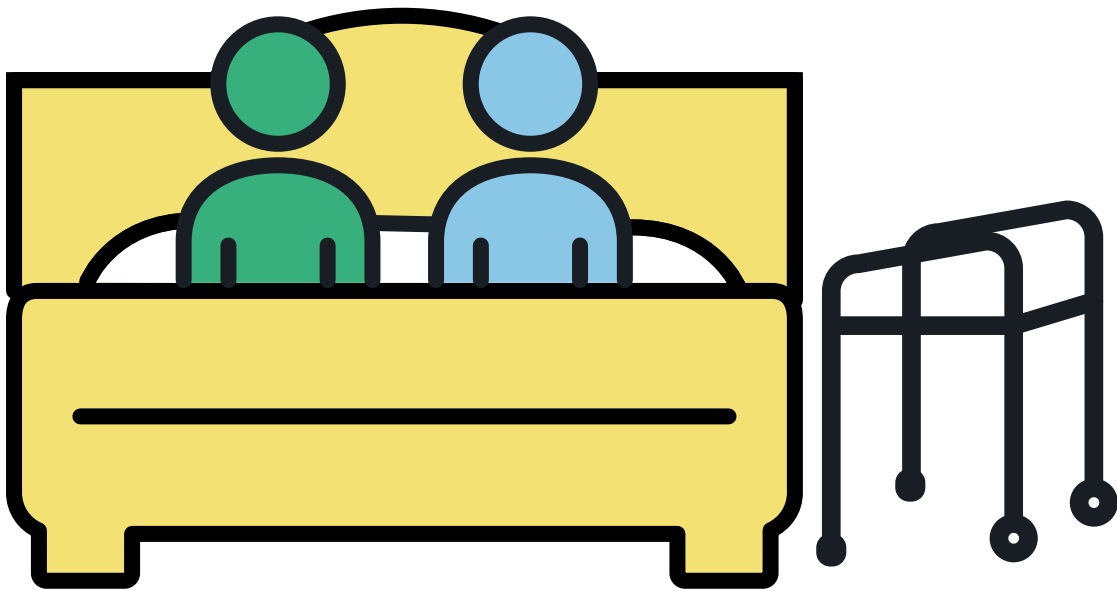


# Disability and Sexual Activity



This information sheet is about the different ways you can have sex.

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Health Canada Santé Canada

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**sieccan**  
Sex Information & Education Council of Canada  
Conseil d'information & d'éducation sexuelles du Canada

# What is sexual activity?

## Sexual activity can be many different things:



Everyone experiences and expresses their sexuality in different ways. What feels good to another person might not feel good to you. What works for you might not work for another person.



Having sex is a process of figuring out and communicating what feels good to you and the people you have sex with.



You can have sex by yourself. Masturbation is when a person touches their own penis or vulva/vagina or anus for sexual pleasure. Some people use sex toys when they are masturbating.

When you are having sex with a partner, your partner can be a disabled person or a non-disabled person. Sexual activity can be different when you have a disabled partner compared to having a non-disabled partner.

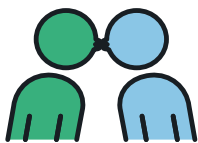


For example:

- A disabled partner might understand your needs better because they have similar needs.
- If you need help with things like getting undressed or getting into a comfortable position, some partners might be able to help you, but some partners might not be able to help you. In some cases, someone else like a caregiver may be able to help you get ready for sex.

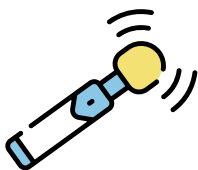
## Sexual activity can be many different things:

Penis-vagina or penis-anal sex are not the only ways to have sex with a partner.



Other sexual and/or intimate activities that can feel good include:

- Cuddling
- Kissing
- Taking a bath or shower with your partner
- Lying naked next to your partner
- Giving your partner a massage or getting a massage from your partner
- Masturbating with your partner
- Using sex toys
- Touching your partner in sensitive areas
- Oral sex (Oral sex is when a person puts their mouth on the penis, vulva, or anus of another person)
- Grinding (Grinding is when a person rubs their penis, vulva, or butt on another person)
- Nuzzling (Nuzzling is when a person rubs their nose or mouth on another person)



Having sex with your partner is not just about the physical part of sex. It can also be about feeling emotionally connected and making each other feel good.

Having an orgasm can feel good, but it is not the **only** reason to have sex with a partner.



Sex with a partner can also make you feel:

- Good about yourself
- Wanted and valued
- Close to and emotionally connected to your partner
- Happy to be with your partner

You do not have to have an orgasm to enjoy sex.

## Sexual activity can be many different things:



Communication is very important when you have sex with a partner. Communicating needs, consent, boundaries, and desires can help each partner feel safe, comfortable, and happy when having sex.

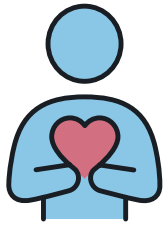


Planning ahead for sexual activity can help you and your partner make time for sex. It can also help you and your partner prepare so you both feel good and ready to have sex.

# Adapting sexual activity to meet your needs

## Exploration

**Try different things to figure out what feels good and what does not feel good to you.**



**Touch different parts of your body** to see which parts of your body, when touched, make you feel good or sexually excited.

You can touch your body yourself, with a sex toy, or have a partner touch you to see if it feels different.

Here is a video you can watch about sensory sensitivities:

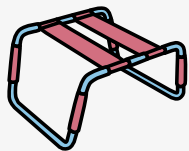
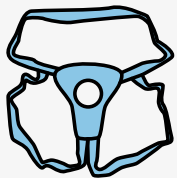
<https://youtu.be/ALPmlk1mQIM>



**Try out different devices and equipment.**

For example:

- Sex toys
- Harnesses
- Pillows
- Position enhancer chairs
- Swings
- Mobility aids



**Try out different positions.**

If you get tired easily, it can be helpful to be sitting or lying down during sex.



Sometimes, you can ask your partner to help you get into a comfortable position or to change positions. In some cases, a care provider may be able to help you get into a comfortable position ahead of time.

## Try different things to figure out what feels good and what does not feel good to you.



**Use lubricants** (“lube”) to make sex more comfortable and enjoyable.



Before having penis-vagina sex or penis-anal sex, **try giving each other massages or touching each other’s genitals for pleasure.** This can help loosen muscles to make penis-vagina sex or penis-anal sex easier and more pleasurable. This can also prevent tearing, which can reduce your risk of getting or transmitting a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Check out [Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\): Information Sheet](#) for more information about preventing STIs.



### **Be patient.**



When you start having sex with a new partner, it can take some time to figure out what works for you and your partner. You might need to try the same thing a few times for it to work well and feel good.

You can talk to friends or online communities to get new ideas.

Sometimes this process can be frustrating, but many disabled people do find sexual activities that make them feel good.



**Have fun with your partner** and try to laugh together when awkward or funny things happen during sex.



**It is okay to try many things and figure out that you do not want to have sex or do not like having sex.**

## Helpful resources about trying different devices, sex toys, equipment, and positions:



- *Teens, Sex and Neuromuscular Conditions: Handouts for You!*  
[https://hollandbloorview.ca/sites/default/files/2023-11/Teens%2C%20Sex%20Neuromuscular%20HANDOUT-Accessible\\_0.pdf](https://hollandbloorview.ca/sites/default/files/2023-11/Teens%2C%20Sex%20Neuromuscular%20HANDOUT-Accessible_0.pdf)
- *The Ultimate Guide to Sex and Disability: For All of Us Who Live with Disabilities, Chronic Pain, and Illness:* <https://www.amazon.ca/Ultimate-Guide-Sex-Disability-Disabilities/dp/B072M5WJP4>
- *Bump'n:* <https://getbumpn.com/>
- *Positioning for Women with Disabilities:* <https://www.bcm.edu/research/research-centers/center-for-research-on-women-with-disabilities/a-to-z-directory/sexual-health/positioning>
- *Sex Positions for Disabilities: A Comprehensive Guide:* <https://ro.co/health-guide/sex-positions-for-disabilities/>
- *5 Disability-Inclusive Sex Positions to Spice Up the Bedroom:* <https://themighty.com/topic/disability/disability-wheelchair-sex-positions/>

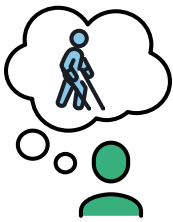
## Communication

### Communicating about your disability to a new sexual partner



Telling a new partner about your disability can be difficult because you cannot be sure how the other person will respond.

For example:



- Some people might have negative thoughts about disabled people.
- Some people might have good intentions but will need your help to understand how to support you.
- Some people might have a really good understanding of being with a disabled person and you will not have to do too much explaining.



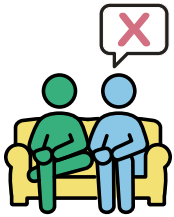
It is up to you to decide **how much effort** you want to put into explaining your disability to a new sexual partner.

**It is not your responsibility to teach other people about your disability.**

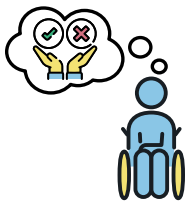




It can be helpful to share this information sheet with a new sexual partner so you do not have to do all the explaining.



If you feel that someone knows very little about having sex with a disabled person and you do not want to teach them, you do not have to have sex with this person. You can find someone who knows more.



It is also up to you to decide **how much you want to share** about your disability. You do not have to go into detail about your disability if you do not want to.

**What is important is that you communicate your needs, preferences, and boundaries to your sexual partner so that your partner knows how to treat you.**

## Communicate with your partner before, during, and after sex.

### Communicate using your preferred way of communicating and respect your partner's preferred way of communicating.

For example, you can communicate by:

- Writing
- Typing
- Speaking
- Using a signal or a word that you and your partner agree on
- Pointing to a symbol on an augmentative or alternative communication (AAC) device



Check out [Sensory Sensitivities during Sex: Information Sheet](#) for different ways to tell your partner something during sex without talking.



### Communicate your boundaries.

Check out the [Setting and Maintaining Boundaries: Information Sheet](#) for more information about communicating boundaries in romantic/sexual relationships.



Check out this checklist of questions you can ask yourself and your sexual partner to learn about each other's sexual desires and boundaries: [https://](https://www.scarleteen.com/article/relationships/ready_or_not_the_scarleteen_sex_readiness_checklist)

[www.scarleteen.com/article/relationships/ready\\_or\\_not\\_the\\_scarleteen\\_sex\\_readiness\\_checklist](https://www.scarleteen.com/article/relationships/ready_or_not_the_scarleteen_sex_readiness_checklist)



## Communicate with your partner before, during, and after sex.

### Ask for and give consent.

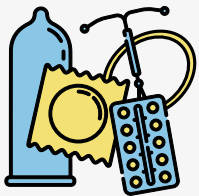


Consent is about asking someone for permission to do something to them or with them and the other person choosing to give you their permission or not. Before having sex with someone, you must get the other person's consent. The other person must also get your consent.

Check out the [Communicating Consent: Information Sheet](#) for more information about asking for and giving consent.



### Communicate about using condoms and birth control before having sex.



Check out [Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections: Information Sheet](#) for different ways to communicate about using condoms with a partner.

Check out [Birth Control Methods: Information Sheet](#) for information about choosing birth control methods.



## Communicate with your partner before, during, and after sex.

### Communicate about what you and your partner like and do not like.

This can include:

- What your partner can do to make you feel good
- How your partner can support you
- When something hurts you
- When something feels good
- If you would like to change sexual activities and/or stop having sex



### Here are some ways to start a conversation about having sex with your partner:

- Before we have sex, I'd like to tell you about the things that work well for me and you can tell me what works for you.
- I've never had sex before and I'm a little nervous because I'm not sure how this is going to feel. It might take us some time to figure out how to do this so that it works for the both of us.
- Let's come up with a safe word for when something does not feel right and one of us wants to stop.
- I find it helpful to plan ahead for sex, but I might have to cancel on you last minute sometimes. I don't want you to take it personally. Sometimes I get flare ups and I don't always know when they will happen.



It is also important to listen and respect the things your partner communicates to you.

## Planning

### Plan ahead for sexual activity with a partner to help you and your partner better prepare.



Pick a time when you think you will have more energy.



Pick a time when you feel good emotionally, physically, and mentally.



You can take a nap or relax so that you feel well rested before having sex.



Have important conversations with your partner before having sex. For example, you can communicate with your partner about using condoms or what you are in the mood for.



Sometimes people like to take a shower or wear clothes they feel good in before having sex so they feel confident about themselves.



Make sure you have the space and things you need to have sex.

## Incontinence

### If you have bladder or bowel incontinence:



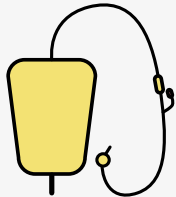
Try not to be in a sitting position during sex because it can make you want to pee or poop more. Lying on your back with a pillow under your back or lying on your side might be better.



Communicate to your partner about how they can support you. For example, discuss what they can do if an accident happens during sex or what positions are better for preventing an accident. A supportive partner will not judge you and will work with you to find solutions.



Try going to the bathroom right before having sex and right after having sex.

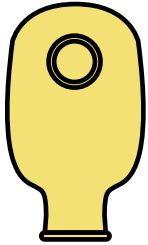


If you use a catheter, you can keep the catheter on during sex.

- If you have a penis, you can put a condom over your catheter and your penis. Using a condom helps with preventing sexually transmitted infections (STIs), pregnancies that you did not plan for, and urinary tract infections.
- If you have a vagina, you can tape the catheter out of the way.
- If you use a catheter valve, you might be able to take off the bag that holds your pee when you have sex.

Talk to your doctor for more information about using a catheter during sex and how to prevent urinary tract infections.

## If you have bladder or bowel incontinence:



If you have an ostomy bag, you can:

- Empty and clean your ostomy bag before sex.
- Make sure your ostomy bag is sealed tightly on your skin so it does not leak.
- Use accessories like lingerie, waist bands, or a belt that are made to cover ostomy bags to help hold the bag in place.
- Use a smaller ostomy bag or one that does not have a hard clip when having sex.

You can ask your health service provider to help you find the right ostomy bag and accessories for sex.

The anus (butthole) and stoma (the hole where the ostomy bag is attached to) may not be recommended to be used for sex. You should speak to a doctor about your specific situation.

**It can be helpful to connect with other disabled youth to share tips and tricks. Online communities can be a good way to share experiences and learn from other disabled youth.**