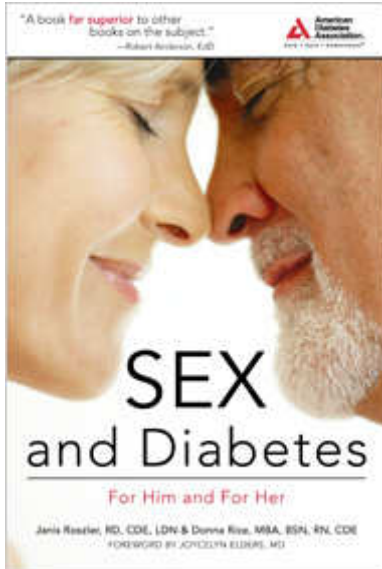


The Romantic Toll of Diabetes

Most people with diabetes worry about the effect the disease has on their bodies. But what about the effect it has on their relationships?



More than 20 million people in the United States have diabetes, and the damage it causes to their bodies, including impeded blood flow to arteries and reduced stamina, often impacts patients' sex lives. Yet many never discuss their unique romantic concerns with doctors.

A new book from the American Diabetes Association attempts to remedy that. "Sex and Diabetes" takes a frank and sensible look at the intimate lives of people with the disease.

By some estimates, from 50 percent to 80 percent of men with diabetes suffer from erectile dysfunction. A strong erection requires healthy veins and unobstructed blood flow, something many people with diabetes lack. Less is known about the sexual effects in women, although experts say women with diabetes often lose their libidos or suffer from vaginal dryness, which can lead to painful intercourse.

Co-author Janis Roszler, a nutritionist, tells the story of one woman who felt guilty about having diabetes and believed her husband no longer loved her. "I brought diabetes into our life," she cried to Ms. Roszler. "It's changed how we eat; it's changed how we go out. He should be with someone else."

The fear that diabetes is interfering with a relationship isn't uncommon, says Ms. Roszler. One of the first strategies for managing diabetes is to change the way a person eats. But our relationships are intimately tied to food consumption — candlelight dinners signal courtship, while large family dinners woo teens to the table. It's no wonder people with diabetes worry their relationships will change as their diets do.

The book begins with a quiz to help readers determine if diabetes is interfering with their sex lives. It explains how diabetes affects the body and contains chapters for men and women that explain ways to combat sexual problems. It includes advice on talking to your doctor and even offers diabetes-approved recipes for romantic mornings and evenings, such as banana-ginger muffins and a chocolate log dessert.

Ms. Roszler says she hopes the book shows people that there are answers for the sexual and relationship problems that often accompany diabetes. "People do better health-wise when they have family support," said Ms. Roszler. "If there is stress in the bedroom, that permeates the rest of their lives."