

CLINIC LOCATION

This program is offered at the **Michael G. DeGroot Pain Clinic** within the **McMaster University Medical Centre** located at:

1200 Main Street West
Hamilton, Ontario L8N 3Z5
Yellow Section, 4th Floor
T: 905-521-2100 ext. 44621 F: 905-577-8022
www.hhsc.ca/pain

Please visit the hospital website at
www.hamiltonhealthsciences.ca for directions and parking.

REFERRAL INFORMATION

www.hhsc.ca/pain

CHRONIC PAIN AND INTIMACY

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Intimacy refers to a feeling or closeness or belonging with someone. While the first thought of intimacy may be physical in nature (ex. Romantic/sexual acts with a partner), intimacy can also be emotional, intellectual and/or experiential. Regardless of type, intimacy usually involves spending quality time with another person in order to enhance that feeling of closeness or belonging.

The subsequent physical and emotional changes of chronic pain can also lead to changes in the way you used to experience

intimacy to how you are experiencing it now. These changes may impact your self-esteem, leading to discouragement and making you feel that you are alone or a burden to those you are close to. In turn, new intimacy issues may arise which further changes your self-esteem, and so forth.

Reframing your self-image while living with chronic pain can lead to a return of dignity and self-esteem and in turn, result in improved intimacy.

Reframing Your Self-Image

Accept yourself as who you are. Identify your strengths and the many things you can offer despite having limitations due to chronic pain. Focusing on what you can offer is healthier than focusing on your shortcomings.

Understand that while your pain may not disappear, you are still worthy enough to build and have meaningful intimate connections.

Identify the relationships in your life where not only you feel supported but also the relationships where you provide positive support to someone and recognize your value in their life.

Self care: take pride in your appearance, eliminate drugs and alcohol – anything in excess, which change your mood and drive, and participate in regular exercise.

Surround yourself with people that have a positive influence in your life; immerse yourself with activities or hobbies that positively impact your mood.

Set reasonable expectations – understand that a transformation to a more positive self image takes time and does not happen overnight but with every small success you are on your way to a better self-image.

Chronic Pain and Sexual Function

Chronic pain comes with physical and emotional changes. These changes can impact aspects of sexual activity i.e. a loss of libido or sex drive, increased performance anxiety before sexual activity, or decreased enjoyment of sexual activity. Additionally, side effects from medications, or alcohol and drug use can also impact sexual function. As you can make changes to have a more positive self-image, you also can make positive changes to how you view the relationship between chronic pain and sexual activity.

Helpful Tips That May Improve Sexual Function

Accept that sexual intercourse is not the only way to experience sexual or physical intimacy

Understand that some enjoy sexual interaction more frequently than others do, and that variation in this is normal

Be honest about pain issues and communicate your needs or expectations to your partner before and during intimacy

Communicate with your partner regarding your need to adjust posture or the “pace” of your intimate activity

Adapting a sexual intimacy mindset of a partnership between two people to figure out what is comfortable and enjoyable to both will lead to satisfaction on both sides versus having to “grin and bear it” for the sake of your partner

Learn to use relaxation methods before and during intimate contact

Change your position periodically and use stretches especially if you are finding yourself stiff or uncomfortable.

To reduce stiffness and soreness in your joints, a hot bath, shower or massage can help prior to and after sexual activity