

Sexuality and COVID-19

What you need to know

There are many symptoms of long COVID, including fatigue, shortness of breath, and even cognitive and mental health issues. These symptoms can have an impact on many areas of your life. So, it's not surprising that they might have an impact on your sexual and emotional well-being, and maybe even on your relationship.



Physical symptoms, anxiety, depression, having to take medication, and relationship issues are all factors that can affect your sex drive and sexual satisfaction. However, there are strategies you can apply to lessen the impact of your long COVID symptoms on your sex life.

Strategies for maximizing sex drive and comfort

1) Communicate openly

Be honest with your partner about your concerns, needs, and desires. Encourage them to be honest with you, too. This will allow you to find solutions together.

Here are some examples of things you can share with your partner.

- I want you to know that my shortness of breath sometimes prevents me from having sex.
- I want you to know that my symptoms might prevent me from being more spontaneous in the bedroom.
- Can we try some positions that won't aggravate my shortness of breath, pain, or fatigue so much?

Sexual intimacy is a source of pleasure, relaxation, and fun. Being able to laugh and make jokes together will help. It's also important to talk about the problems you're having as a couple. Be willing to try different ways of expressing your affection, listen to each other, and let each other know what feels good! You may discover new aspects of your sexuality that bring you more satisfaction than before you had long COVID.

2) Maximize your comfort

Here are some strategies to help you feel more comfortable:

- Make sure the room isn't too hot or too cold.
- Avoid drinking alcohol, which can affect sexual performance, for example, causing vaginal dryness and making it difficult to get an erection or achieve orgasm.
- Consider making pain-relieving activities, such as massages, baths, or hot showers, part of your foreplay. Pain can reduce your desire for sex.
- Try to identify certain times during the day when you have more energy.
- For example, after a nap or first thing in the morning. Energy management strategies can also increase or enhance your libido.

And depending on your symptoms and needs, certain positions may be better than others. For example, if you suffer from shortness of breath, avoid positions that put pressure on your chest. Instead, try positions that require less energy and use pillows to make yourself more comfortable. Take the time to try several options to see what works best. If you start to feel short of breath or tired during sex, let your partner know. You can try slowing down, taking a break, changing positions, or switching to a different sexual act.

Sex isn't limited to penetration and orgasm. It can also include things like mutual masturbation, oral sex, the use of sex toys, or even just massaging, caressing, and kissing each other. These are all activities that require less energy and can be very pleasurable.

Other things to consider

- Urinating before sex can help prevent incontinence. Limiting your fluid intake and avoiding diuretic drinks, such as coffee and soda, are also recommended.
- Many people with long COVID struggle with anxiety or depression, conditions that can cause or aggravate sexual problems. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist, or a psychologist, sex therapist, or occupational therapist to explore your options.
- Mobility problems and other physical disabilities can make you feel less sexually attractive. Even if you've been in a committed relationship for many years, these issues can be a source of stress for you and your partner. This is completely normal. Talking to a therapist, individually or as a couple, could help.
- Don't hesitate to talk to your doctor or another health professional, such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist, about the symptoms that are affecting your sex life. For example, there are strategies that can help prevent coughing and shortness of breath when you lie down.

References:

- Refinery29 (2021). Covid long: les conséquences sur la sexualité dont personne ne parle. <https://www.refinery29.com/fr-fr/sexualite-et-covid-fatigue-essoufflement>
- Halper, J. (2021). Multiple Sclerosis and Sexuality. LiveWiseMS. <https://livewisems.org/resources/journal-articles/multiple-sclerosis-and-sexuality>
- <https://www.blf.org.uk/support-for-you/sex-and-breathlessness/suggestions>

If you have questions about long COVID, please email us at: readaptation.covid.cisssmo16@ssss.gouv.qc.ca.

Our mission

To maintain, improve, and restore the health and well-being of the Québec population by making accessible an array of integrated and quality health and social services, while contributing to the social and economic development of Québec.

Our vision

Accessible and efficient health care and services that adapt to the needs of Québécois.

Our goals

The CISSS de la Montérégie-Ouest achieves its goals through its innovative approaches and stands apart through:

- its exemplary offer of care and integrated services based on interdisciplinarity, accessibility, and adaptability to the needs of its population;
- its willingness to question and improve its professional, clinical, and administrative practices;
- its appreciation of its personnel and the implementation of human resource management practices;
- its strong relationships with its partners.

Our values

Our actions are guided by five equal and interconnected values: compassion, collaboration, commitment, confidence and consistency.