

Questions of intimacy

When a woman reaches perimenopause, her experience of sexual intimacy often changes significantly. That is something that can impact a marriage deeply. For a while, sexual desire may increase but more often, desire decreases as hormone levels decrease and the act of sexual intercourse can, for some women, bring significant pain. Add to that, the increase in urinary tract infections that many women experience after sexual intercourse, God's good gift of sex (Genesis 2:24) can quickly become something deeply unappealing. If conversation doesn't happen, wives can be isolated, husbands can be left confused and marriages plummet into trouble. With wise and compassionate conversation, however, there is no reason why this season cannot continue to be a time of intimacy and physical flourishing. What might couples helpfully discuss?

1. **Experience:** In what ways is sex feeling different in this season? What is proving enjoyable? What is proving much more difficult? How are these differences impacting how you both feel about engaging in sexual activity – how is it impacting your view of each other?
2. **Medication options:** HRT is not for everyone, but it is very much an option. There are low doses of HRT available in pessary form that can help with intimacy – do you want to discuss that with your GP or pharmacist? Lubricants can be a blessing and enable sexual activity that is far more comfortable.
3. **Verbal intimacy and encouragement:** In those seasons when sexual intimacy is less frequent and potentially less physically satisfying, what words of encouragement can help keep your relationship strong? How can you reassure one another of an ongoing attraction even when that attraction is not being acted upon as it once was? Words can be reassuring and stimulating.
4. **Other forms of physical intimacy:** Not all intimacy needs to culminate with penetration. Of course, it is likely that couples will want to engage in full intercourse sometimes but in what other ways can physical touch bring both pleasure and a deepening of relationship?
5. **Creativity:** To what extent are both partners willing to experiment with different positions and pace? It is likely that some positions will be less painful than others. A slower pace can often feel more manageable. Mutual, loving discernment of what works well can be a blessing to both partners.
6. **Prayer:** What can you be praying for each other in this season? How would you like the Lord to be growing you? How can this time, difficult though it may be, bring blessings and increasing sanctification?

Such conversations can feel a little awkward but there is flourishing to be found. And a real intimacy that enables you to revel in each other's bodies without causing pain.