News for Loving Couples

Female heart attack patients want to know how much sex their tickers can take—but many are afraid to ask their cardiologists.

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Chances are you've probably heard the one about the elderly man who came and went at the same time. But as amusing as this little joke may be, many heart attack patients may not find it funny. After all, they may fear this very thing.

In a recent study, scientists polled 17 women from a large multi-state study of health and sexual outcomes after heart attack. Researchers asked the women about their lives before and after their heart attacks. Findings showed most women prefer that their doctors give them more information about how to safely resume sexual activities. But many didn't raise the conversation with their cardiologists.

"Most women don't have discussions with their doctors about resuming sex after a heart attack even though many experience fear or other sexual problems," confirms Emily M. Abramsohn, MPH, a researcher at the University of Chicago, and the study's lead author. Findings showed many cardiac patients feared that sex might trigger another heart attack. Their biggest concerns? When to resume sex and how much activity their hearts could handle.

Researchers also found that of the few women who initiated a discussion about the issue with their doctors, most were unhappy with the information they received.

Ideally, doctors should have this talk with heart patients while they're still in the hospital. What's more, these chats should continue during a patient's recovery, with other doctors on the health care team looped into the discussion.

Don't be shy, Abramsohn says. "If your doctor isn't giving you information to help you feel more comfortable about [sexual activity], it's important for you to ask them for it."

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