



The following excerpt has been taken from the Christopher & Dana Reeve Foundation Paralysis Resource Center website.

http://www.paralysis.org/site/c.erJMJUOxFmH/b.1306553/k.F2A4/Sexuality_for_Women.htm

Female Sexuality and Pregnancy

Sexual Health

Sexual identity is a significant and encompassing aspect of one's personality – sexuality plays an essential role in how we feel about ourselves, how we relate to others, how others relate to us.

To be sure, paralysis often affects peoples' sexuality, including changes in physical functioning, sensation and response. Self-image can be shaken. People wonder if they can have sex again at all, whether they can attract a partner, whether the partner will stay, whether having children is possible.

While the range of sexual options may be different, physical attraction and sexual activity are realistic expectations – no matter the level or completeness of paralysis. Sexual pleasure is possible. Paralyzed women can have children; paralyzed men can be dads. Paralyzed people can have loving and lasting relationships.

The key to successfully redefining one's sexual identity is experimentation and open communication. It helps to understand the anatomy and physiology of sexual function and sexual response. It may also help to connect with appropriate resources and knowledgeable health care professionals or counselors to best come to grips with the available options.

The Paralysis Resource Center has divided the Sexual Health section by gender. The Sexuality for Men

(http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.4453431/k.A0C5/Sexuality_for_Men.htm) category includes a brief overview of male sexual function and the effects of paralysis. The Sexuality for Women

(http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKgMWKwG/b.4453433/k.F255/Sexuality_for_Women.htm) area includes basic information on female sexual function, including childbearing and childcare.

http://www.christopherreeve.org/site/c.mtKZKGMWKwG/b.4453429/k.8982/Sexual_Health.htm

Sexuality for Women

Research suggests that the main difference in sexual functioning between women with disabilities and nondisabled women can be accounted for by the difficulties women with disabilities experience in finding a romantic partner. Level of sexual desire is the same, but level of activity is less because significantly fewer women with disabilities have partners.

Generally speaking, sexual expression in the paralyzed female is less affected than in the male; it is physically easier for the woman to adapt or redefine her sexual role, albeit a passive one.

Women with paraplegia or quadriplegia and of childbearing age usually regain their menstrual cycle; nearly 50 percent do not miss a single period following injury.

Pregnancy is possible, and most spinal cord injured women can have normal vaginal deliveries, although certain complications of pregnancy are possible. Among these are premature and autonomic dysreflexia (for those with injuries above T-6, characterized by high blood pressure, sweating, chills, and headache) during labor. Also, loss of sensation in the pelvic area can prevent the woman from knowing that labor has begun.

There are also some special considerations related to contraception. Oral contraceptives are linked to inflammation and clots in blood vessels and the risk of these is greater in women with spinal cord injuries. Intrauterine devices cannot be felt in the paralyzed woman, and may cause undetected complications. Use of diaphragms and spermicides can be difficult for those with impaired hand dexterity.

Vaginal lubrication can be an issue. Some SCI women report that they do have reflex lubrication and others do not. When substitutes are needed, water-soluble lubricants, e.g., Today, Astroglide, KY Jelly, are preferable. Vaseline is not recommended; it is oil based.

Orgasm is possible for a paralyzed woman if there is some residual pelvic innervation, though this is relatively rare. Some men and women are able to experience what has been referred to as "paraorgasm" or "phantom orgasm," through reassignment of sexual response to areas of the body unaffected by the injury. This is described as a pleasurable, fantasized orgasm that mentally intensifies an existing sensation.

Sources: The Center for Research on Women with Disabilities, UAB Spain
Rehabilitation Center/Medical RRTC in Secondary Complications in SCI, Paralyzed Veterans of America, National Spinal Cord Injury Association

Websites

<http://www.sexualhealth.com/channel.php?Action=view&channel=3>

Sexualhealth

Sexualhealth is a website featuring information on sexual function and pleasure for people with disabilities.

<http://www.pyamagazines.com/pnnews/magazine/article.php?art=691>

<http://www.pyamagazines.com/pnnews/magazine/article.php?art=678>

Paraplegia News

This site provides Paraplegia News' two part series on women's sexuality by Dr. Stanley Ducharme, a clinical psychologist in the Departments of Rehabilitation Medicine and Urology at Boston University Medical Center.

<http://www.spinalcord.ar.gov/Fact%20Sheets%20html/femalesexuality.html>

Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission

The Arkansas Spinal Cord Commission offers a Female Sexuality and Spinal Cord Injury fact sheet.

<http://www.disaboom.com/spinal-cord-injury-sci-information/sexuality-and-fertility-impact-on-women-with-sci>

Disaboom: Sexuality and Fertility: Impact on Women with SCI

<http://www.disaboom.com/parents-with-disabilities>

Disaboom: Parents with Disabilities see various blogs on pregnancy with a disability

www.bcm.tmc.edu/crowd/

Center for Research on Women with Disabilities

The Center for Research on Women with Disabilities (CROWD) focuses on issues related to health (including reproduction and sexuality), aging, civil rights, abuse, and independent living.

Phone: 1-800-44-CROWD

Fax: 713-961-3555

<http://www.bermansexualhealth.com/>

Berman Sexual Health

Berman Sexual Health is a website for women seeking help with sexual function problems such as lack of desire, arousal, lubrication, orgasm, and pain.

<http://calder.med.miami.edu/pointis/sexuality.html>

University of Miami School of Medicine

The University of Miami School of Medicine offers detail on sexual physiology and functioning, orgasm, fertility, childbirth, and more.

www.mobilewomen.org

Mobile Women

Online forum for women with disabilities especially wheelchair users. Features a section on Sexuality and Relationships and a section on Reproductive Health and Pregnancy.

Email: wendy@mobilewomen.org

www.bhawd.org

Breast Health Access for Women with Disabilities

Alta Bates Summit Medical Center

2001 Dwight Way

Room 2362, 2nd Floor

Berkeley, CA 94704

Phone: 510-204-4866

Publishes a book called "Breast Health and Beyond for Women with Disabilities: A Provider's Guide to the Examination and Screening of Women with Disabilities".

<http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=32375&site=1021&return=19803>

University of Alabama at Birmingham's Research Review Fall 2000 Women's Health and Sexual Function After a SCI

www.groups.yahoo.com/group/SARFP/

Sex and Relationship Facilitation Project for People with Disabilities

A closed Yahoo email group for people to discuss the development of sexual and relationship facilitation for people with disabilities. Aimed at raising self-esteem and body esteem and enhancing interpersonal relationships and skills.

<http://sci.washington.edu/info/forums/reports/sexability.asp>

Sexability. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, 2009. streaming video 62 mins.

Pregnancy Info:

Sexuality and Spinal Cord Injury: Where We Are and Where We Are Going

<http://www.ed.gov/pubs/AmericanRehab/spring97/sp9707.html>

Pregnancy and Women with Spinal Cord Injuries (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

<http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=22442>

UAB: Pregnancy

<http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=21598&site=1021&return=21874>

The National Study of Women with Physical Disabilities: Pregnancy

http://www.bcm.tmc.edu/crowd/national_study/PREGNANC.htm

NSCIA's Forum on pregnancy and SCI:

<http://www.spinalcord.org/forum/>

<http://www.ahrq.gov/clinic/epcsums/sexlspsum.htm#Availability>

Agency for Health Care Research (AHRQ)'s report "Sexuality and Reproductive Health Following Spinal Cord Injury".

The following books and videos are available for free loan from the PRC library. For more information, please see www.paralysis.org and click the Lending Library tab.

Books

- Blackburn, Maddie. **Sexuality & Disability**. Oxford, UK: Butterworth Heinemann, 2002. This book is specific to those with spina bifida and hydrocephalus.
- Karp, Gary. **Disability & The Art of Kissing: Questions and Answers on the True Nature of Disability**. Life on Wheels Press, 2006. 2nd ed.
- Kuttai, Heather. **Maternity Rolls: Pregnancy, Childbirth and Disability**. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 2010.
- Rogers, Judith. **The Disabled Woman's Guide To Pregnancy and Birth**. New York, NY: Demos Medical Publishing, 2006.
- **Sexuality and Reproductive Health in Adults with Spinal Cord Injury: A Clinical Practice Guideline for Health Care Professionals**. Washington, DC: Paralyzed Veterans of America, 2010.

Video

- **Disability and Motherhood**. Princeton, NJ: Films for the Humanities & Sciences, 1995. (25 minutes)
- **Doin' It: Sex, Disability and Videotape**. Chicago, Ill.: Beyondmedia Education (35 minutes) DVD.
- **Molly and Jeramy: Relationships, Sexuality and Spinal Cord Injury**. Sherborn, MA: Aquarius Healthcare Videos, 2004. (25 minutes) DVD and VHS.

- **Reproductive Health for Women With Spinal Cord Injury Part 1 – The Gynecological Examination.** Birmingham, AL: RRRTC on Secondary Conditions of SCI, 1997. (30 minutes)
- **Reproductive Health for Women With Spinal Cord Injury Part 2 – Pregnancy & Delivery.** Birmingham, AL: RRRTC on Secondary Conditions of SCI, 1997. (32 minutes)
- **Sexuality Reborn.** West Orange, NJ: Kessler Institute for Rehabilitation, 1993. (48 minutes)
- **Toward Intimacy: Women With Disabilities.** New York, NY: Filmmakers Library, 1992. (60 minutes)
- <http://www.spinalcord.uab.edu/show.asp?durki=97417>
University of Alabama at Birmingham’s streaming video on Sexuality and Sexual Function (59 minutes)
- **Untold Desires.** New York: Filmmakers Library, 1995.
Both men and women with disabilities discuss their quest to be recognized as sexual beings and their right to become parents.
- **Women’s Sexuality After SCI.** Miami, FL: University of Miami School of Medicine, 2003. (18 minutes)

The information contained in this message is presented for the purpose of educating and informing you about paralysis and its effects. Nothing contained in this message should be construed nor is intended to be used for medical diagnosis or treatment. It should not be used in place of the advice of your physician or other qualified health care provider. Should you have any health care related questions, please call or see your physician or other qualified health care provider promptly. Always consult with your physician or other qualified health care provider before embarking on a new treatment, diet or fitness program. You should never disregard medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read in this message.