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The benefits of sex – at any age



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Author Laurie Betito describes her Sex Bible for People Over 50 as a relationship book.

Fair Winds Press/Quiver

MONTREAL — Following are some of the myriad health benefits of being sexually active past 50, as described by Montreal clinical psychologist Laurie Betito in her new book, *The Sex Bible for People Over 50: The Complete Guide to Sexual Love for Mature Couples*.

Sex helps to resolve pain

We accept certain forms of pain — a headache, say, or an old injury — as a part of life, Betito writes. When pain is disturbing enough, “adults over 50 can more easily push off sex ... But be mindful of just how easily ‘not tonight, dear’ can then be invoked tomorrow night, the rest of the week, the rest of the month ... and then one day you wake up and wonder how you went from a sexually active partner to a sexless distant roommate.”

Paradoxically, she says, sex is one of the best ways to resolve headache pain — or almost kind of pain, for that matter. “Headaches are caused when the blood vessels in your head constrict. Sexual intercourse alleviates that tension and causes those blood vessels to expand, thus relieving your headache.”

Sex can lower blood pressure and stress levels — at any age

It releases tension, elevates mood and creates a profound sense of relaxation, Betito writes. Sex causes the release of endorphins and increases levels of white blood cells that boost the immune system, she notes. “Researchers have found that even non-penetrative sex, which can include simply kissing, hugging and touching, can have the same effect.”

Sex increases overall happiness

It can do everything from give people a more positive outlook on life to increase self-esteem and diminish feelings of insecurity by making people feel desirable. It can keep partners more connected.

Sex improves fitness and overall health

Regular sexual activity, Betito writes, does everything from improve memory to reduce cholesterol levels, increase circulation and raise energy levels. Plus it burns up to 250 calories every 30 minutes.

She cites a study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* of more than 3,000 participants age 57 to 85, which found that those having regular sex rated their general health higher than others. Betito cites a study in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* in which British

researchers found that men who had sex at least twice a week ran a significantly lower risk of a fatal heart attack than those who had sex less than once a month.

Sex can reduce the risk of prostate cancer. Regular sex increases blood flow to the vaginal walls, in turn making the vagina more elastic and moist. As well, sexual activity promotes greater estrogen production: Women who don't have a partner can use sex toys to keep the vagina healthy, Betito writes. The book has a section on sex toys.

Sex slows aging

A study that followed more than 900 men from the time they were age 45 to 49 until their deaths found that men who had more orgasms lived longer. In one Scottish study of 3,500 people age 18 to 105, volunteer judges found that couples having sex at least three times a week looked, on average, seven to 12 years younger than those who had sex less frequently.

When couples have the desire and willingness to be sexual, but there are other hurdles, such professionals as sex therapists can help, Betito writes. She has helped many couples over the years, she writes, and it has been gratifying. "I often tell my clients, 'You're here in my office because of your strength, not your weakness. It takes strength to admit that we need help.' "

Among instances she cites of when to seek sex or couples therapy: If you're having serious relationship difficulties and can't resolve them; if the subject of sex comes up often but you make no progress; if either of you has unresolved issues that are affecting your relationship; if your sexual relationship has never been satisfactory; if you experience any

sort of sexual difficulties for an extended period, or if you routinely avoid sex.