

# Communication, Intimacy, and Sex

Understanding and Overcoming Sexual Challenges in MS



WEBINAR   
WEDNESDAYS

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# UPCOMING PROGRAMS

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 15**  
**JUMPSTART**

Building Confidence Inside and Outside of the Bedroom

**WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28**  
**MS MOVES MEETUP**

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 29 &  
FRIDAY, MARCH 1**  
**TAKE CHARGE**

Progression and Aging with MS

**STARTING March 12**  
**COACHING SERIES**

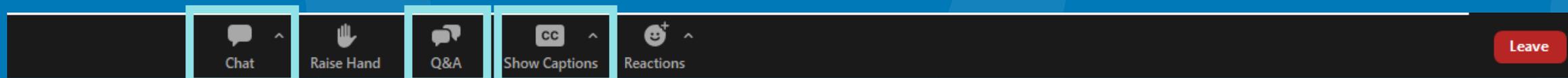
How to Reduce Your Risk of Falling



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# How to Ask Questions During the Webinar

Type in your questions  
using the Questions Box



Provide comments and engage  
with the speakers and audience  
using the **Chat Box**

**NEW!** Closed captioning

# YOUR SPEAKERS



**Joan Augustyn**  
Occupational Therapist

Kansas



**Matthew Sacco**  
Psychologist

Ohio

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES



- 1 Gain confidence in communicating with healthcare professionals and partners about sexual activity
- 2 Learn about ways that MS can directly and indirectly affect sex and intimacy
- 3 Discover modifications for sexual satisfaction and function

# Things to keep in mind

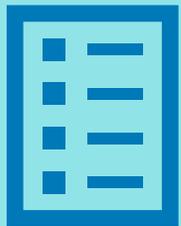
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This Webinar is for **EVERYONE** regardless of relationship status, gender, sexual orientation, etc.



The information presented is from a clinical perspective



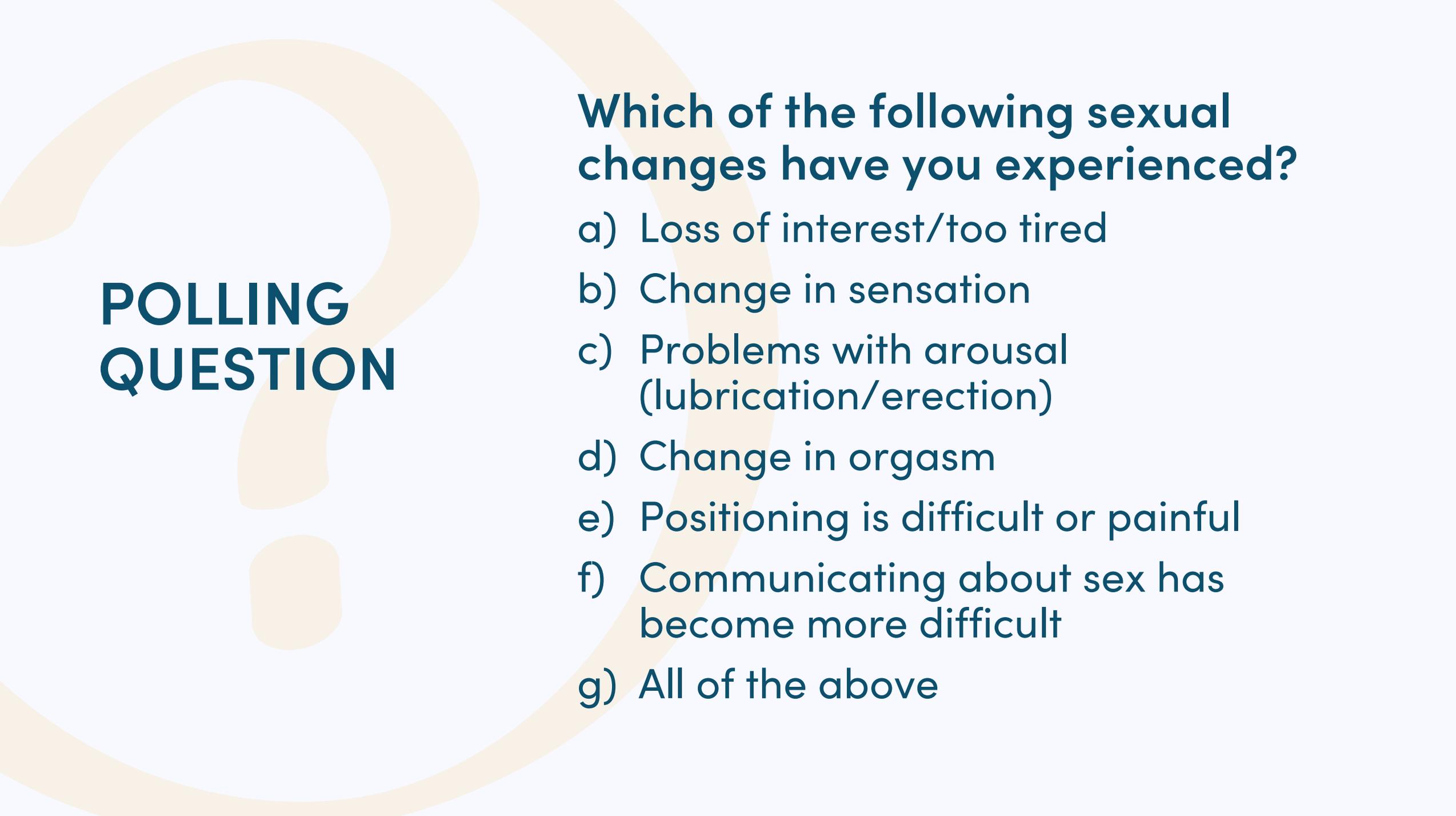
Take what information you'd like from this program, leave what you don't



# POLLING QUESTION

How often do you experience satisfaction with your current sexual activity?

- a) Never
- b) Rarely
- c) Sometimes
- d) Most times
- e) Always



# POLLING QUESTION

**Which of the following sexual changes have you experienced?**

- a) Loss of interest/too tired
- b) Change in sensation
- c) Problems with arousal (lubrication/erection)
- d) Change in orgasm
- e) Positioning is difficult or painful
- f) Communicating about sex has become more difficult
- g) All of the above

# Challenges in communication



- Typically a highly emotional topic
- Can be difficult to talk about
  - Especially if it was difficult before MS
- Even more difficult with MS-related changes/symptoms

**Work with your healthcare team AND your sexual partner**

# MS changes sex and intimacy

MS can affect sexual feelings and responses both directly and indirectly

<b>Directly</b> Disease-related process/damage	<b>Indirectly</b> Psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Sex drive</li><li>• Sensation</li><li>• Fatigue</li><li>• Spasticity</li><li>• Pain</li><li>• Bowel/bladder issues</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Depression</li><li>• Anxiety</li><li>• Body image</li><li>• Anger</li></ul>

# Sexual Satisfaction

Satisfaction and function are different

- **Function**

- Sexual desire, arousal, and orgasm which are impacted by:
  - Sensation changes, spasticity, fatigue, etc.

- **Satisfaction**

- Frequency and quality which are influenced by:
  - Mood, openness, confidence, solitary or shared





# Who can help?

**Any member of your healthcare team!**

- Neurologist
- Psychologist
- Occupational Therapist
- Physical Therapist
- Physician
- Nurse
- Etc.

# MS Intimacy and Sexuality Questionnaire

## Multiple Sclerosis Intimacy and Sexuality Questionnaire (MSISQ-19)

**INSTRUCTIONS:** To better understand the impact of multiple sclerosis (MS) on intimacy and sexuality, this 19-item questionnaire asks you to rate how various MS symptoms have interfered with your sexual activity or satisfaction over the last 6 months. Questions may be answered by placing a check or any other mark in the square located next to the question and below the appropriate number. There are no right or wrong answers. If you are unsure how to answer a question, please choose the best answer you can.

Over the last 6 months, the following symptoms have interfered with my sexual activity or satisfaction:	Never 1	Rarely 2	Occasionally 3	Almost Always 4	Always 5
1. Muscle tightness or spasms in my arms, legs, or body	<input type="checkbox"/>				
2. Bladder or urinary symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>				
3. Bowel symptoms	<input type="checkbox"/>				
4. Feelings of dependency because of MS	<input type="checkbox"/>				
5. Tremors or shaking in my hands or body	<input type="checkbox"/>				
6. Pain, burning, or discomfort in my body	<input type="checkbox"/>				
7. Feeling that my body is less attractive	<input type="checkbox"/>				

# Relationship changes



Shifts in roles or changes in partnerships

- MS can interfere with completing daily activities and responsibilities
- Often changes who becomes responsible for tasks
- Partner can start feeling more like a caregiver
- Directly impacts feelings of intimacy and closeness

# Overcoming challenges



## Plan a date night

(not unique to having a chronic illness!)

- Plan for activities that reduce added stress
  - Ex. Don't go out to eat at a restaurant. Make dinner at home or order in.
- Choose an environment you're more familiar with
  - Ex. Don't go to a movie theatre. Rent a movie and watch it at your place or the lounge of your apartment complex

# Overcoming challenges



## Plan for sex

- Reduce distractions
- Manage/coordinate medications when possible to control for effects that might interfere with sex
  - Ex. Sedating
- Try to plan for times when feeling more optimal – Time of day? Day of the week?

There will still be times, despite best efforts and planning, dates and/or sex will need to be rescheduled

# Modifications

- Arousal and/or sensations may change
  - Relearning how, when, where you'd like to be touched
- Explore new ways for arousal or increased stimulation
  - Search for Adaptive or Accessible Sex Toys
- There are aids for things like lubrication, spasticity concerns, and changes in grasp or grip strength



# Bowel and bladder considerations



- Contenance can be embarrassing to have to think about before or after sex
- Communicating with your sexual partner is important
- Things to try
  - Towels to protect furniture and sheets
  - Schedule times to urinate or void
  - Catheters can be secured during sex
    - Check with neurologist or urologist
    - Self-cath or void before sexual activity

# Key Takeaways



- MS can make sex more complicated
  - It doesn't mean you have to give up!
- Members of your healthcare team can help!
- Everyone is a sexual being with individual unique needs
  - Knowing your own body is important
- Being deliberate and conscientious about sex and intimacy can open a new chapter in a healthy sexual relationship

Q+A



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# Managing Your Whole Health

## Top 10 Tips to Live Better With MS

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