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Boomers Redefine Sex as Extended Foreplay

Sex doesn't have to decline when you're over 50. Boomers have discovered a fun way to make it last longer.

posted by **John Stark**, December 3, 2012 [More by this author](#)



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I had lunch with a friend last September who's a few years older than me (I'm 64). He and his wife are in advertising. We hadn't talked for a while, so I looked forward to our catching up at a local bistro. From the moment we sat down to eat, he began telling me about their rejuvenated sex life. You'd have thought he was 18 the way he carried on, a glow in his eyes.

I was surprised by his openness. After all, we had never discussed our sex lives with each other. At

one point he told me that he and his wife of many years had discovered sex toys. They'd been ordering them on the Internet. He even gave me some consumer advice: Some "sex toys" can be found at any hardware store, and for less money (use your imagination).

While on vacation in Florida recently I ran into an old friend of mine, Carlos, who's a psychiatrist. He's in his mid-50s and lives in New York. I was telling Carlos about my exchange with my friend back home. And also about two separate conversations I had just had with two retired friends in Florida. They told me they were spicing up their sex lives in ways I didn't really want to know about.

When I made a judgmental remark about my friends' behaviors, Carlos essentially told me to lighten up. Boomers, he noted, are redefining everything about aging, including sex.

"When you're young, sex is about getting to the orgasm as quickly as possible," Carlos said. "But as you get older it's not so easy. Wham bam is no longer the case. To compensate, boomers have extended the foreplay. Toys, fantasy and role-play are all a part it."

Extended foreplay? When Carlos put it that way, my aging libido took notice. If I can still remember, isn't foreplay the best part of sex? I wanted to know more about this phenomenon, but Carlos had other things on his mind, like going to the beach. He gave me the name of a colleague of his, a psychotherapist and certified sex therapist to call when I got back home, which I did.

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Making All the Stops Along the Way

"Carlos is right," Dr. Patrick Mulhall, 46, told me from his office in Hollywood, Fla. "Sex for people over 50 is not just about focusing on intercourse and orgasm. It is about extended foreplay — having fun and taking fantasy to the max.

"I work with lots of couples who are in their 50s and 60s. I had a couple in their 80s who wanted to find new ways to have sex, and three times a week. As boomers get older, they feel that time is running out, so they're expressing more interest in their sex lives."

But if reaching a climax is more difficult, how can one be satisfied? How does one not feel sexually frustrated or diminished? "One of the first things I teach couples, whether straight or gay, is that sex is not about the orgasm, but about the two of them feeling good," Mulhall said. "Sex should be about pleasure and enjoyment. Once they get to that point — and it's more difficult for men — they don't have to fixate on the orgasm and can enjoy the ride."

Women, he noted, are usually more open to finding new ways to express their interest in sex. He attributes that to the media, particularly *Sex and the City*. "Lots of women are buying sex materials on line," Mulhall said. "They talk openly about vibrators, dildos and toys. These subjects aren't taboo anymore."

The couples who come to see Mulhall are looking for ways to reinvigorate their marriage or partnership. "The first thing they tell me is they haven't had sex for a while, sometimes six months, even 10 years," he said. "The first thing I teach them is how to do sexual explorations. That's where they go home and explore each other's bodies from head to toe. That opens the door to more touch and fantasy. They discover each other's erogenous zones. This is much more intimate than just having intercourse. I also send them to sex stores to look at toys and videos, to find new ways of exploring their sexuality. At an older age, sex is not just about the genitals."

Don't Always Have to Be Up for It

This extended foreplay, as Carlos called it, gives new hope to men who have become impotent with age, often for medical reasons, like prostate surgery, Mulhall said. "Maybe they've tried implants or Viagra, and they haven't worked," he said. "Maybe they can't get an erection. But being erect is not what sex is all about. In fact, there are ways to have an orgasm without an erection, like masturbation with a flacid penis."

Another way to practice extended foreplay is through tantric sex. "I have older couples who are getting into it," Mulhall said.

By coincidence, I ran into a tantric sex teacher at a cocktail party the other night in Minneapolis, where I live. I asked the bearded, 49-year-old yogi about this boomer phenomenon. "People who attend my workshops are usually over 50," he said. "Younger people aren't as interested. Tantric sex is ideal for older people. It's about maintaining sexual desire, exploring the body and continually staying in a heightened state of arousal. It's about taking your time to enjoy pleasure, like holding each other and staring into each other's eyes. Sex isn't just about the lava flow."

When I asked him what happens when extended foreplay does result in a lava flow or climax, his fingers gripped the stem of his martini glass in an attempt to steady himself. His eyes were closed.

On a follow-up call with Mulhall, I asked the same question.

"It's intense," he said, "very intense."

Now I know why my fiftysomething friends are so eager to tell me about their newfound sex lives. In fact I pity anyone under 50 who's having sex. They'll have to wait to find out what they're missing.