

Snow On the Roof and Fire In the Basement

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The phrase, “just because there is snow on the roof doesn’t mean there can’t be fire in the basement,” one of my father’s favorites, is often associated with the stereotypical “dirty old man.” Too bad. As couples age, there is no reason for interest in sexual contact, romance or passion to disappear. However, they do seem to diminish for many couples who have grown old together. Can anything be done?

As we age, our bodies experience all manner of changes. Many activities we engaged in during the past are no longer physically possible for us or we are unable to do them as we once did. And sexual functioning can certainly be affected by age related physical changes. But, research has shown that some couples well into their 70s and beyond still enjoy an active sexual life. Do they have a secret?

It would appear a major ingredient in their “secret” is how they **think about** affection, romance and sex. The short version is this: when couples **believe** affection, romance and sex are “normal” and desirable at their age, they are much more likely to describe this part of their life together as satisfactory. To put it another way, couples who “work” to keep alive the romance in their marriage, who routinely show affection in a variety of ways, are couples who are more likely to have a satisfying sexual life. **This seems to be true for all couples, not just aging couples.**

While some of the age related diseases such as, advanced diabetes or out of control hypertension, can diminish a person’s ability to experience sexual

intercourse, they should not hamper other forms affection. Kissing, touching, hugging, snuggling and the like are still possible, still can be pleasurable, and can increase feelings of well being and marital satisfaction.

One of the factors which aging couples can control is how they think about their appearance, their bodies. As our bodies lose the shape and tone they once had, we tend to become self-conscious about them and, therefore, less willing to have our partners see them. As our wall of “modesty” goes up, the distance between us and our partner increases. This need not happen.

One older man put it this way to his wife, “When I see you today, I still see the girl I fell in love with, the beautiful person I married, the woman I had children with. With my head, I know there are wrinkles and sags, just like my own, but with my heart, I never see those things.” How could any woman resist this wonderful statement of love? And surprisingly, I’ve heard it more than once, and not just from men; perhaps not this beautifully put, but the message was the same: I love you and your body, just as they are.

Perhaps it is time to stop believing the commercials which tend to emphasize the smooth and youthful as the only body type. Maybe then we can think about ourselves differently and believe them when our partners say they do as well.

Growing old together need not be just a comfortable companionship of roommates. Affection and passion can be close at hand. After all, as my dad used to say, “Just because there is snow...”