



Thank you for joining us for the Swedish Women's Wellness Virtual Series on Sexual Health.

The Women's Wellness Series promotes our vision of the Women's Wellness and GYN Specialty Services at Swedish. The program will provide education and comprehensive care for women at every stage of life, including primary care, emotional health, wellness and prevention, specialty and surgical care. We are grateful to Drs. Dunsmoor-Su, Fuller, and Maas for a candid discussion on women's sexual health as we age. Please find below their contact information and key highlights from the discussion.

Rebecca Dunsmoor-Su, M.D.

Located at Swedish First Hill

Focus: Gynecology, specifically on the vulva vaginal specialties and menopause

**To schedule an appointment:
206-215-6300**

Ashley Fuller, M.D.

Located at Swedish First Hill

Focus: Gynecology, specifically sexual health

**To schedule an appointment:
206-215-6300**

Peg Maas, PT

Located at Swedish Cherry Hill

Focus: Pelvic floor therapy

**To schedule an appointment:
206-320-2404**

How does libido change with the onset of menopause? How can I fix it?

Many women may experience fluctuations in their libido as they enter menopause. While a decrease in estrogen may be a factor in some women's lower libido, Dr. Fuller shares that women's hormones are not the only cause. Other factors include sleep, stress related to family or work, medications, pain during sex, and relationships with our partners. Drs. Dunsmoor-Su and Fuller recommend that women discuss their concerns with their physician and assess any lifestyle habits they may be able to change, such as sleep and stress levels. Next steps may include intimacy and sex therapy, FDA-approved medications, or topical testosterone. Work with your physician to find the solutions that will be right for you.

What are the forms of hormone treatment? How long do I need to use it?

Vaginal estrogen and systemic estrogen are two examples of hormone treatment options for menopause

symptoms. Vaginal estrogen is often used to target concerns directly related to the vagina, such as vaginal dryness and tightness. Systemic estrogen is used to address menopausal symptoms such as hot flashes, night sweats, or brain fog, and come in various forms that include pills, gel capsules, and creams. The duration of hormone therapy will depend on your symptoms and personal preferences. Discuss your concerns with your physician to find the best treatment option for you.

Why do I have pain with sex? What can I do?

With the onset of menopause, a woman's body will begin to produce less estrogen, which can make the vagina become drier and tighter. This transition can make penetrative sex painful and lower a women's desire to engage in sexual activity. If you are having painful sex, consult with your physician to discuss options to reduce your discomfort, which may include hormone treatment and pelvic floor physical therapy.

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WOMEN'S WELLNESS

Do Kegel exercises help my sex life?

Dr. Maas shared that many physical therapists do not use the term "Kegel" and that most women who do "Kegels" outside of physical therapy are often performing them incorrectly. Pelvic floor exercises, if done correctly, can enhance pelvic floor strength and blood flow to the pelvic region. However, like low libido, there are many factors that may be causing painful sex and tension in your body.

What is pelvic floor physical therapy? Why might women go?

The pelvic region is a complex set of muscles, nerves, and tissue that can be the source of concern for many women's sex life as they age. Incontinence, or the feeling that you must urinate, can cause women to clench their pelvic floor muscles during sex, which in turn can make sex painful. This experience can make women feel uncomfortable or less willing to engage in sex.

Dr. Maas shared that pelvic floor physical therapy can be an excellent resource and space for women to share their physical and sexual concerns with a specialist. A consultation will often include an evaluation of how you run or walk and a pelvic exam if the patient is comfortable. The physical therapy sessions emphasize collaboration and use clear communication to help women understand their bodies. Discuss your concerns with your physician to learn if you may benefit from pelvic floor physical therapy.

Where can I find other reliable sexual health resources?

While your physicians are a reliable resource for questions regarding sexual health, there are also excellent resources online and in print. The website, <https://www.omgyes.com/> provides an open forum for women to discuss and learn about techniques to maximize their sexual pleasure. If you would prefer print resources, "Becoming Cliterate," by Dr. Laurie Mintz, is a self-help book that helps women explore and understand their own body and sexual pleasure.

The program for Women's Wellness is fueled by private support. Contributions will help to create educational programs and materials, build out clinical services and address research needs to provide women with knowledge to navigate their healthcare while providing the highest level of care.

If you are interested in supporting this effort, please contact Lorna Kneeland, lorna.kneeland@swedish.org or (206) 215-2217.

To learn more about Women's Wellness and Gyn Specialty Services, please visit our website [here](#).