



An essential guide to sexual health at midlife and beyond for women and the men who love them, ***Yes You Can: Dr. Barb's Recipe for Lifelong Intimacy*** offers sound medical advice that will empower women to remain as sexually active as they wish for as long as they choose. Reflecting Dr. Barb DePree's decades of experiences providing health care for women, this collection from her "MiddlesexMD" blog posts covers the entire recipe for sexual health, consisting of these ingredients:

Knowledge: Know the physiology of menopause so that one understands what is happening when it happens. Although every woman's experiences is unique to her, none of us is alone. And we need to know some new sexual techniques that will keep sex enjoyable as we age.

Vaginal Comfort: Women need to learn how to care for their vulvo-vaginal tissues so that sex remains comfortable.

Genital Sensation: Women need to compensate for less blood flow and less sensitivity in their genital tissues by providing themselves with more stimulation and more sexual sensation.

Pelvic Tone: Women need to learn why and how to strengthen and maintain their pelvic floor muscles to encourage circulation and maintain or strengthen their orgasms.

Emotional Intimacy: At every age, women need sex to be intimate; it needs to mindfully create and reinforce a real connection.

This book tells the real stories of Dr. Barb's patients and the challenges they have faced, not only with menopause but other health conditions as well, such as arthritis, cancer and hormonal changes...all of which can impact sexual desire. She provides sound, reassuring, medically proven advice and frank, unblushing discussions of topics that affect the quality of life for so many women today.



Barb DePree, M.D., a gynecologist in practice for over 25 years, specializes in midlife women's health. She is certified through the North American Menopause Society as a provider, and was named the 2013 NAMS Certified Menopause Provider of the year. Sharecare named her as a Top 10 Social Healthmaker for Menopause in September of 2013.

Finding that products helpful to her patients' sexual health were not readily available, Dr. DePree founded MiddlesexMD.com. The website was created to share practice-tested, clinically sound information and products for women, including guidance for working with partners and caregivers. Dr. DePree also publishes regularly on her own blog, providing updates on research in women's sexual health, as well as observations and advice based on her work with women in her practice.

A collection of blog posts outlining the MiddlesexMD recipe for sexual health has resulted in the publication of ***Yes You Can: Dr. Barb's Recipe for Lifelong Intimacy***. Dr. DePree's articles have also appeared on NextAvenue.org, RedHotMamas.org, VibrantNation.com, and more; she's been published in OBG Management. She is a frequent spokesperson for women's sexual health, quoted in Self, Everyday Health, and Huffington Post, among others, and has been interviewed for radio, television, and documentaries.

MiddlesexMD[®]

Interview Questions

After decades of experience, why did you come to believe that this book was needed?

Yes, You Can is an effort to keep women engaged in their continued sexuality, especially as it pertains to becoming menopausal and aging. We all understand the need to add reading glasses for our failing vision, and skin creams for our aging skin, but women seem to neglect the focus on maintaining their sexual health. They don't have the knowledge of what it takes, so the loss begins and progresses, sometimes until it's too late. It is well understood that sexuality adds a great deal to quality of life, including physical and mental health, but how we actively maintain, or in some cases regain sexual health. This is a book that helps women understand the expected changes that may be encountered and then also offers some solutions to address those changes.

What is the most interesting aspect of your work with mid-life women?

The most interesting aspect of my job is related to the variations in how women transition through menopause. For some it is a 'non-event', and for others it is a nuclear event. It is fascinating to me that as women, everyone of us will experience ovarian failure and the most important and impactful hormone you have had circulating for the past 40 years, is now largely absent. And generally we expect women to just carry on, after all it is natural, right? Right, but natural doesn't always equate to manageable.

How do you see the changes in treatment options for menopausal women versus 20 years ago?

We have additional treatment options for women, there are more dosing options, more delivery options, and more medication options in general. We have greater knowledge of the nuances of treatments for women's health. Then again, we are still missing some FDA-approved treatment options, so some women go without adequate treatment or we go 'off label' (Using a drug for something it is not intended for).

Has the conversation changed? If so, how?

Ironically it was easier 20 years ago, we didn't have the disruptive WHI findings to contend with and we didn't have the endless access to false information on the internet. We have improved products to offer women, but women are more reluctant to consider those very effective treatment options.

Tell us a bit about MiddlesexMD and why you created the site.

As a gynecologist who speaks to women daily about general health and more specifically about sexual health, I was impacted by the overwhelming dissatisfaction for women and their sexual health. It also became apparent to me that there are not reliable, trustworthy, and tasteful resources to gain information and purchase products related to sexual health. Sexuality is such an important aspect of well-being, for self and in relationship, and we typically don't address it well in the healthcare arena. I wanted a resource for women to access to gain that information necessary to maintain/regain their sexual health, and since I couldn't find it, I created it.

How can vibrators help women other than for pleasure?

One of the consequences of menopause and aging, is the loss of blood supply to the genitals. This area is largely impacted by menopause, and unfortunately in a negative way. The benefits of using a vibrator regularly is that it provides the more intense, direct stimulation where women find it most pleasurable, and in the process it is promoting improved blood supply which in turn keep those tissues more supple and elastic. It is not uncommon for women to be on medications that may interfere with the ability to orgasm, and a vibrator can be a tool to help overcome that.

Can you share with us a few key tips for women as they go from perimenopause to menopause?

Lifestyle matters more. I could leave it at that. But to expand further, the importance of adequate sleep, good quality food/fuel, and exercise as well as stress management can't be overstated in their importance. Women have usually spent about 3 decades focusing on kids, husband, jobs, family and often haven't taken the time to nurture themselves. Well now is the time!

Do you find women are still interested in sex as they get older? Does it change? If so, how?

The answer to this is sometimes, and often it does change. It is always hard to generalize when we talk about sex because the experiences, the relationships are so individual, but in general, women lose desire. For a variety of reasons, the hormonal and physical changes mentioned above often lead to increase in discomfort, more difficulty with arousal and orgasm and this can contribute to loss of desire or drive. We know long term monogamous relationships tend to be a factor in losing desire. Novelty is great for a sexual relationship but 30 years later there may be little of that around. This is an area where habits play a role, and it can be difficult to create new habits. And this conversation hasn't really addressed that men are increasing having sexual function issues that make this more challenging as well.

Many women over 50 start to feel invisible. Do you think having a conversation about sex and aging can help that?

I see both camps here, women who feels less confident and secure in themselves and those who are discovering a sense of place in the world, a stronger sense of self and voice. The perimenopause to menopause transition has with it a number of physical and often emotional components that cause women to take stock in themselves, maybe for the first time, the future and decide to make the 'second half' look different. Having a conversation about sexual health is often critical path for the health of the relationship. Many women seem to think that their lack of interest and disengagement from sex won't have any implications to the relationship they are in. 'He's OK with this' (this being absence of sexual activity) is a common comment I hear. I'm just not convinced this is the path to a wholly healthy ongoing relationship and encourage women to consider options to continue to 'opt in'.

What kinds of questions do you hear the most from your patients?

I love my partner but I have little drive, what's that about? I can't orgasm, or it takes forever. I'm not sleeping well. I'm really irritable, especially with my family. I've gained weight and I don't feel good about myself. Sex is now more painful.

Did you grow up in a home that discussed sex? How has your work changed your attitudes as a woman? A mother? A physician?

I grew up in a home where sex was not discussed explicitly. My mother was diagnosed with MS when I was an infant, and she became progressively disabled until her death when I was 32, living her final years in a nursing home. While she was relatively well she was an absolute advocate for women maximizing their ability to achieve. I think I understood what it meant for my dad to have a disabled wife, and it was difficult for all of us. My present practice of gynecology, focusing on midlife women has been great. Every day I get to encourage women to become their better selves, to take the time to nurture themselves and focus on important aspects of their health, which includes sexual health. My husband and I have 3 daughters, I hope they have heard the message of the importance of maintaining health, and maintaining healthy relationships which includes sexual health. Unfortunately there is so much out there that undermines women and developing their own healthy sexuality, we need to be focusing on our young women and promoting their sense of sexual self.

Do you think for women over 50 that “sexy” is an attitude? Some tips to help women feel sexy?

‘Sexy’ is an attitude that incorporates so many voices. In the end if a woman can acknowledge her own sexuality and then hear about her sexual worth and appeal from her partner she is certainly more likely to have a positive attitude and feel ‘sexy’.

What new treatments and devices do you see coming along to help women with their sexual function and health?

I'm really encouraged by the application of technology to women's sexual health, and by the recognition that sexuality, for women, has many parts. Tools like the Intensity, which uses electrical pulses to strengthen the pelvic floor, and the Fiera, which uses suction and vibration to increase genital circulation, are just a beginning. Apps that can provide prompts and feedback on healthful habits are suggesting whole new areas for exploration.

In medical treatment, we're still limited. I've been happy to see progress, as I said, over the years I've been practicing. I'm hoping the pace of that progress accelerates, for more pharmaceutical options. Every woman is unique, and more options helps me as a practitioner find the right path forward for each woman.