

Not only is there evidence that weekly sex may be health-promoting for premenopausal women,⁵⁵ there is also research showing that it may also reduce symptom distress for perimenopausal women—those going through the transition period into menopause. Hot flashes are rarer, and if they do occur, they tend to be milder than in women whose sexual encounters are infrequent. Other studies on postmenopausal women show that the adage “use it or lose it” may have a bearing on a woman’s sensuality and sexuality. Vaginal atrophy (apparent deterioration of tissue) is a common problem for menopausal women. One study reported that there was significantly less vaginal atrophy in menopausal women who had more active sex lives.⁵⁶ For those women who did not have a partner, self-stimulation—masturbation—helped to reduce atrophy, apparently, theorizes Dr. Cutler, because the gentle stimulation increases blood flow to the area and helps delay the hormonally induced declines.

After more than two decades of research, Dr. Cutler concludes that having sexual intercourse “at least once in each nonmenstruating week (i.e., [at least] once in each seven-day span)” helps slow the aging process in women and promote naturally higher estrogen levels—especially from the late thirties through menopause and beyond. “Biology is teaching us an important lesson,” she explains, and the lesson is that “sporadic sexual activity [having intercourse less often than once a week] is not good for a woman’s endocrine system.”⁵⁷

Note: We strongly caution you against: (1) Making this another “have-to” habit in your relationship and feeling stressed or guilty if more than a week goes by without sex; (2) using—even once—Dr. Cutler’s research as an excuse for promiscuous “sex as exercise”; (3) inferring that this research condemns the option of celibacy (there are studies suggesting potential health benefits from celibacy when compared, over the long term, to sporadic—less than weekly—sexual activity)⁵⁸; or (4) assuming that if you live alone and presently do not have an intimate sexual relationship with another person, your health may suffer.