



Bumping While Pumping

Written and clinically reviewed by Marissa Town, RN, BSN, CDCES

Let's talk about it

Whether you feel comfortable talking about it or not, sex is a normal part of life. That's right, we're talking about sexual intimacy, because as usual, diabetes makes things more complicated. The key to ensuring healthy sexual intimacy with diabetes is honest communication. This can seem intimidating when you are in a newer relationship, but as the saying goes: "Honesty is the best policy."

Blood Sugars and Sex

It can be difficult to talk about sex for many people due to the social stigma around sex. But without having conversations about your needs, you could be putting yourself at risk. Depending on the amount of physical exertion, sexual activities can cause low blood sugars. It's always a good idea to keep low treatments nearby so that you can easily treat your low. I know, I know; it's not exactly sexy to drink a juice box when you're in the heat of the moment, but it's better than having a severe hypo.

High blood sugars pose their own challenges with sexual activities. High blood sugars can cause decreased blood flow to sexual organs, which can mean inability to obtain or maintain an erection or vaginal dryness.¹ High blood sugars can also lead to long-term sexual dysfunction as well as changes in normal hormone levels.² Blood sugars that are high or low can also make it difficult to achieve orgasm. Thanks, diabetes, for interfering with all parts of our lives, including our sex lives.

Pumps and CGMs

Diabetes technologies are super helpful for managing blood sugar levels but adds some complexity when it comes to physical intimacy. (And when walking by cabinet or drawer handles that ALWAYS seem to be the exact right height to fishhook you by your pump tubing... *Shakes Fist*) Personally, I remove my insulin pump during sexual activities, because ripping out infusion sets is one of my least favorite parts of diabetes. Just don't forget to reconnect afterwards!

As it turns out, many people with diabetes do the same if they use insulin pumps with tubing. In a study of almost 300 people with T1D living in Australia, 75% reported disconnecting their pump during sex to avoid any issues.³ One in four people who were not using insulin pumps said sex-related concerns were a factor in not using an insulin pump. For those who use the tubeless pump option, there is still a risk of dislodging the pod.

When it comes to CGMs, there is also a risk of the sensor coming off inadvertently. 20% of the participants in the study in Australia felt that their CGM interfered with their sexual activity, and 18% said it affected where they place their CGM.³ The other aspect besides the physical attachment of the devices are the alerts and alarms. Which aren't only an annoyance or cause of embarrassment, but an indication of blood sugars being out of range and possibly requiring treatment.

Bottom Line

When you have diabetes, you can't run from it. It's a part of your life and affects all parts of your life. Whether or not you are wearing diabetes devices, you still have it. Yes, it means you're a little different than people who have fully functioning pancreases. And maybe it means that you need to take a little more care of yourself when you are sexually intimate. But if the person you're with cares about you, it won't matter to them.

Take care of yourself, first and foremost, and have open communication with your partner about how your diabetes impacts your sex life. Who knows, maybe they'll help open your fruit snack pack for you when you need it, or remind you to reconnect your pump after you've been disconnected.

References:

1. [The Link Between Diabetes and Sexual Dysfunction](https://health.clevelandclinic.org/the-link-between-diabetes-and-sexual-dysfunction) (https://health.clevelandclinic.org/the-link-between-diabetes-and-sexual-dysfunction)
2. [Better Intimacy With Diabetes](https://www.diabetesselfmanagement.com/managing-diabetes/complications-prevention/better-intimacy-diabetes) (https://www.diabetesselfmanagement.com/managing-diabetes/complications-prevention/better-intimacy-diabetes)
3. [The Impact of Externally Worn Diabetes Technology on Sexual Behavior and Activity, Body Image, and Anxiety in Type 1 Diabetes](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7196867/) (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7196867/)