

Promoting sexuality and intimate relationships in adults with a neuromuscular disease in occupational therapy

A guideline created by the *Groupe de recherche interdisciplinaire sur les maladies neuromusculaires (GRIMN)*, in collaboration with NMD4C investigators **Samar Muslemani** and **Dr Cynthia Gagnon**

NEUROMUSCULAR DISEASES (NMD)

include impairments which may interfere with sexuality in different ways, such as:

Primary impacts

Erectile dysfunction, lack of lubrication, pain during sexual activities

Secondary impacts

Difficulty to accomplish sexual activities due to weakness and fatigue

Tertiary impacts

Body image, anxiety or depression

THE GUIDELINE



AUDIENCE

Aimed towards **occupational therapists (OT)**. Guidelines are in development for physical therapy and nursing



POPULATION

Conceived for patients with any **NMD diagnosis**. It can be used with other populations who have **similar impairments**



CONTENT

Based on the **Ex-PLISSIT model** and includes opening the subject, evaluation, intervention and referral

FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

- 1 According to one study, even if 60% of healthcare professionals consider that sexual difficulties must be addressed, **only 6% initiate the discussion on a frequent basis**
- 2 When discussing sexuality, **the client should be made comfortable talking about their concerns** (e.g. by telling them that it is not uncommon for people with the same condition to have similar difficulties). It is important to ask direct questions
- 3 During sexual intercourse, some positions can be difficult to adopt or hold for a long time. **OT can intervene by adapting the positions** used in bed and improving comfort (e.g. positions on the back or "spoon" can be good alternatives)
- 4 **Sex toys can compensate for the physical disabilities related to sexuality.** OT can recommend assistive devices to compensate for certain disabilities or propose simple adaptations to make them easier to use
- 5 **People with disabilities face a higher risk of sexual abuse.** It is important to discuss the subject with the client in order to support the helping relationship if the professional has reason to believe that the client is being abused. When this type of issue is raised, an interdisciplinary approach is recommended



Samar Muslemani is an occupational therapist, doctoral student and knowledge broker within NMD4C

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A Series of Infographics Presented by the **Neuromuscular Disease Network for Canada (NMD4C)** and **Muscular Dystrophy Canada (MDC)**

