



**PSYCHOSEXUAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL ASPECTS
OF MALE AGING AND SEXUAL HEALTH**

Michael E. Metz & Meta Associates St. Paul, Minnesota	Michael H. Miner University of Minnesota Medical School Minneapolis, Minnesota
---	--

***ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the male aging process in the context of the biological and psychosocial dimensions of male sexual health. The scientific literature concerning the physiological and psychosocial aspects of male aging, and the impact of aging on male sexual function and sexuality is summarized and discussed. A biopsychosocial model for conceptualizing the interaction between the various aspects of the aging process is proposed as a means of assisting men in adapting to their changing sexuality in a positive way. The importance of distinguishing between the normal changes in sexual function and response associated with aging and those changes associated with specific health problems is emphasized.*

Cet article examine le processus du vieillissement chez l'homme en ce qui a trait aux dimensions biologiques et psychosociales de la santé sexuelle masculine. On y trouve un résumé et un examen des articles scientifiques portant sur les aspects physiologiques et psychosociaux du vieillissement au masculin de même que sur le retentissement du vieillissement sur la fonction sexuelle et la sexualité de l'homme. Les auteurs proposent un modèle biopsychosocial permettant de conceptualiser l'interaction entre les différents aspects du vieillissement en vue d'aider les hommes à s'adapter à l'évolution de leur sexualité. L'article souligne l'importance de faire la distinction entre les variations normales de la fonction et de la réponse sexuelles secondaires au vieillissement et les changements occasionnés par des problèmes de santé spécifiques.

Key words: Male sexual health Aging Psychosexual issues

There is considerable discussion about the effect of aging upon men's physical, psychological, and sexual health. In both the medical and popular literature, there are comparisons to women's aging, and some have proposed that there is a male "menopause" similar to women's (Heller & Myers, 1944; Werner, 1939) which "strikes at the core of what it is to be a man [...] his youthful sexual drive and performance" (Sheehy, 1993) and purportedly includes such symptoms as hot flashes, depression, insomnia, mood swings, irritability, impotence, decreased libido, weakness, lethargy and lose of bone mass. Also, it has been observed that men, on average, have shorter lives than women (Nathanson, 1990; Niven & Carroll, 1993). In the United States, for example, the average life expectancy of men is about seven years shorter than that of women. Yet women also report experiencing more illness, being more incapacitated by their illnesses, and making greater use of medical care than men do (Verbrugge, 1985).

This paper offers a summary of the professional literature examining aging and sexuality among men. In spite of claims to the contrary, a review of the premium medical literature regarding male aging suggests that normal physiological and sexual changes as men grow older are gradual and modest (Metz & Miner, 1995). In addition, the psychosocial literature suggests that there are few consistent emotional or cognitive changes associated with age, and some appear to be beneficial rather than disabling. Subsequently, we advocate a biopsychosocial model that acknowledges an ongoing interaction between physical and psychological health, and recognizes that there is a variety of physical and psychological scenarios within which aging men experience their sexuality. On the one hand, for men who adapt to the inevitable

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to: Michael E. Metz, Ph.D., Meta Associates, Baker Court, Suite 200, 821 Raymond Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55114. Tel: 651-642-9317x107; Fax: 651-642-1908; email: MMetzMpls@aol.com.