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## Intimacy and Aging

Sexual intimacy as we age is becoming a very hot topic.

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[VIDEO: Intimacy and Aging 5-12-10](#)

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By NBC15's Carleen Wild

NOTE: Click on the VIDEO LINK above to watch this report.

If you are lucky and take care of yourself, you will be among the millions of Americans heading for old age. And along with conversations about long term care, estate plans and medical decisions, some say sexual intimacy and our hopes for ourselves as we age should also be on the table, especially with family. □

A few nighttime dramas have touched on the subject recently. It is even a cover story on a recent issue of AARP. Sex or sexual expression as we age is very real and it is becoming a very hot topic.

There are few days that go by that Hal Blottner isn't by his wife Sue's side.

He is with her everyday -- helping Sue exercise, feeding her at lunch and just enjoying the time with her. They've been together for the past 58-years.

They aren't able to live together anymore because of the care Sue now needs for her Alzheimer's. She may not always realize it is him there for her -- but Sue always seems happy to see him and to be shown love.

Hal says: "As far as excessive, touchy-feely, probably not but we can be expressed in other ways. We were always very supportive of each other."

While Hal and Sue may show affection through a kiss, holding hands, or help eating lunch, a growing number of others their age want more.

How that need for emotional and physical intimacy is expressed (especially in an environment where

one or both parties may suffer from some form of dementia) is a topic we, as a society, are only just beginning to explore.

Mary Salzeider says: "Most important thing is we need to be loved. To feel were being loved until the moment we die."

Mary Salzeider, with the Alzheimer's and Dementia Alliance, says there needs to be policies and procedures in place so that when an issue comes up (such as involvement with someone who may not be a spouse, public displays of affection, privacy concerns, or a families objections) everyone can better deal with it.

But to her knowledge, few here or anywhere right now are having this discussion.

The Hebrew Home at Riverdale saw a need for policies to be in place. Not only did they create a training video, but a workgroup as well, consisting of caregivers, psychologists, administrators and family members. They also created a document called "Policies and Procedures Concerning Sexual Expression." Both, have since been copyrighted.

Hebrew Home is increasingly being asked to share these resources as the rest of us come to a realization there is no magic age that the need to be touched and loved gets turned off.

"Sexual expression has a major benefit of bringing pleasure to people. And people who are having pleasure are less tense, less depressed, less irritable, just generally are in good mood for longer periods of time. Also sense of peace and contributes to calmer mental status."

Experts agree that even in cases of dementia, as long as it is consensual, sexual expression is a right.

"I think it's critically important. For all that dementia takes away, our ability to reason, to focus, for all that it takes away, doesn't take away essence of who we are, the humanness."

Experts tell us the conversation about sex and sexual expression as people age will get easier to have, especially because as baby boomers age, they are pushing this conversation and younger caregivers are more open to hearing it.

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