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Family Caregiver Alliance

Founded in the late 1970s, Family Caregiver Alliance is the first community-based nonprofit organization in the country to address the needs of families and friends providing long-term care for loved ones at home.

FCA, as a public voice for caregivers, shines light on the challenges caregivers face daily and champions their cause through education, services, and advocacy. The services, education programs, and resources FCA provides are designed with caregivers' needs in mind and offer support, tailored information, and tools to manage the complex demands of caregiving. These include: FCA CareNav, a secure online solution for quality information, support, and resources for family caregivers; Family Care Navigator, sponsored by the National Center on Caregiving (NCC), helps caregivers locate support services state-by-state; The NCC unites research, policy, and practice to advance the development of high-quality, cost-effective programs and policies for caregivers in every state; and the Bay Area Caregiver Resource Center (CRC) — one of 11 California CRCs — operated by FCA for the six-county San Francisco Bay Area. Our Family Consultants work closely with families caring for ill or elderly loved ones. Visit caregiver.org.

Aging and Intimacy: For Older Adults and Family Caregivers

Rachel Creed

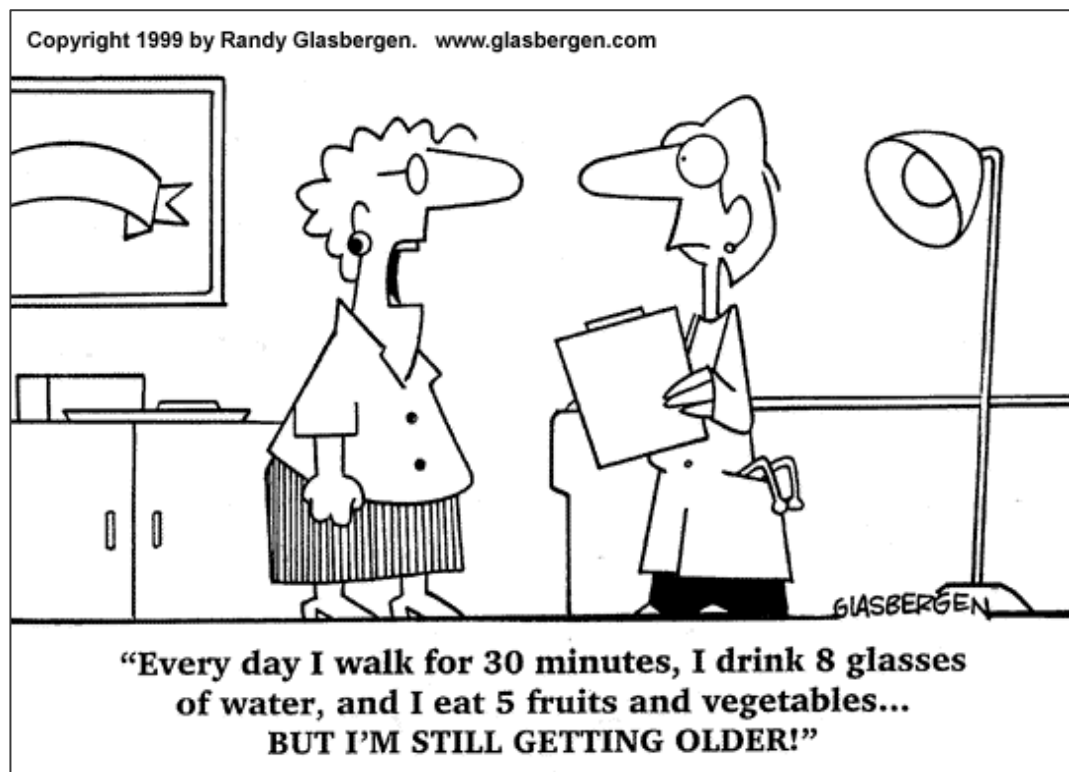
Family Caregiver Alliance
Bay Area Caregiver Resource Center
National Center on Caregiving

May 14, 2021



What is aging?

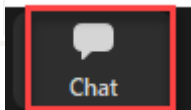
- **Process**
- **Varying changes**
 - Physical
 - Emotional
 - Cognitive
- **Stereotypes**
- **Inevitable**



What is intimacy?

- Defined as **closeness between people in personal relationships**
- Can be physical, emotional, spiritual, etc.
- Intimacy ≠ sex

“Our need for intimacy doesn’t fade as we age”
(Harvard Health, 2020)





Intimacy vs. Sex

- **Open communication**
 - Using certain terms (e.g., sleeping over, spending time)
- **Consent /Safety**
 - Provide transportation
 - Facilitate dating

Sexual Health for Older Adults

- **STI rates have increased**
- **HIV symptoms are often misdiagnosed in older adults**
- **Embarrassment around asking for STI/HIV tests**
- **Preventative measures decrease with age**
 - STI/HIV testing
 - Safer sex ~ condom usage
- **Lack of education around sexual health**



How does aging affect intimacy and sex?

- **Varying physical changes in the body**
 - Normal (e.g., natural process)
 - Result of chronic illness (e.g., Diabetes, heart condition, etc.)
- **Mental health**
 - Depression
- **Psychoactive drugs and medication**
- **Potential cognitive changes**
 - Alzheimer's disease
 - Dementia



Dementia, Intimacy, and Sex

- Capacity is a spectrum
- Behaviors differ based on diagnoses
 - Ex: Undressing (time of day, weather, restroom needs)
- Affection vs. sexual activity
- Talk to a doctor/
neurologist

Responding to sexual behavior changes

- Do not overreact or express shock
- Try to redirect the person to another activity
- Avoid becoming angry or argumentative
- Do not use shame or ridicule
- Redirect to a private area if behavior is inappropriate for a public setting
- Be sensitive and reassuring

Source: Alzheimer's Association: [alz.org](https://www.alz.org) / 800.272.3900



Social Considerations

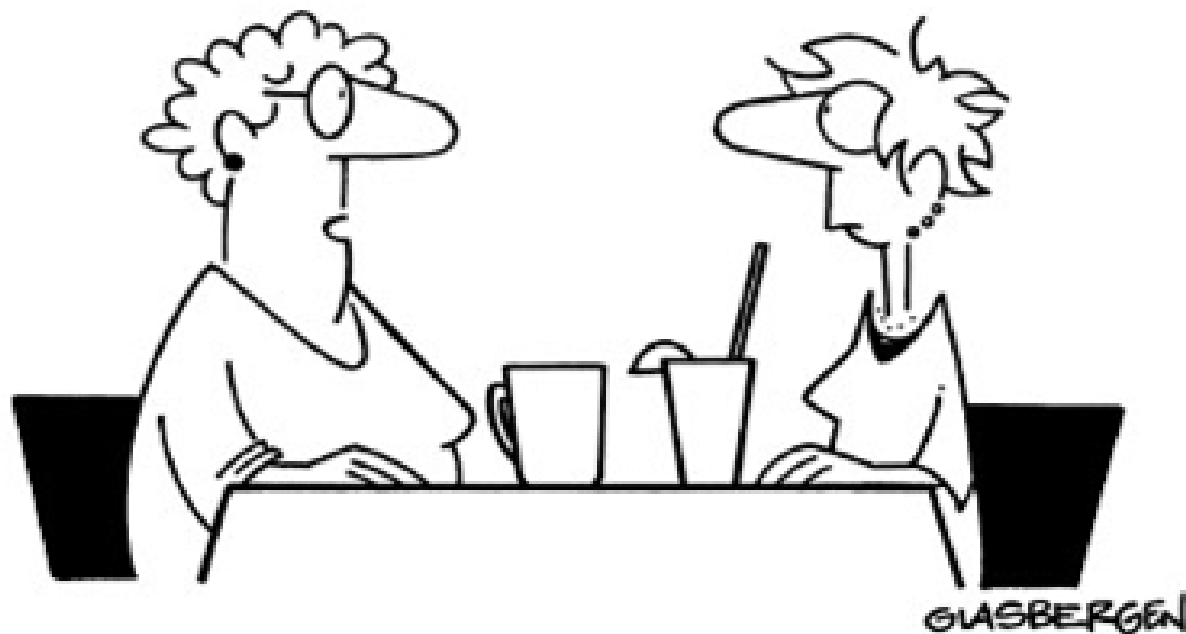
- **Isolation**
 - Cultural attribution
 - Abuse or neglect
- **Reluctance to discuss** effects of aging with family and/or doctor
- **Lack of privacy**
- **Stigma** around LGBTQ intimacy
- **Technology** – online dating/friendship apps



Why is intimacy important?

- New relationships
- Nurture self and others
- Combat loneliness, depression, cognitive decline
- Build trust

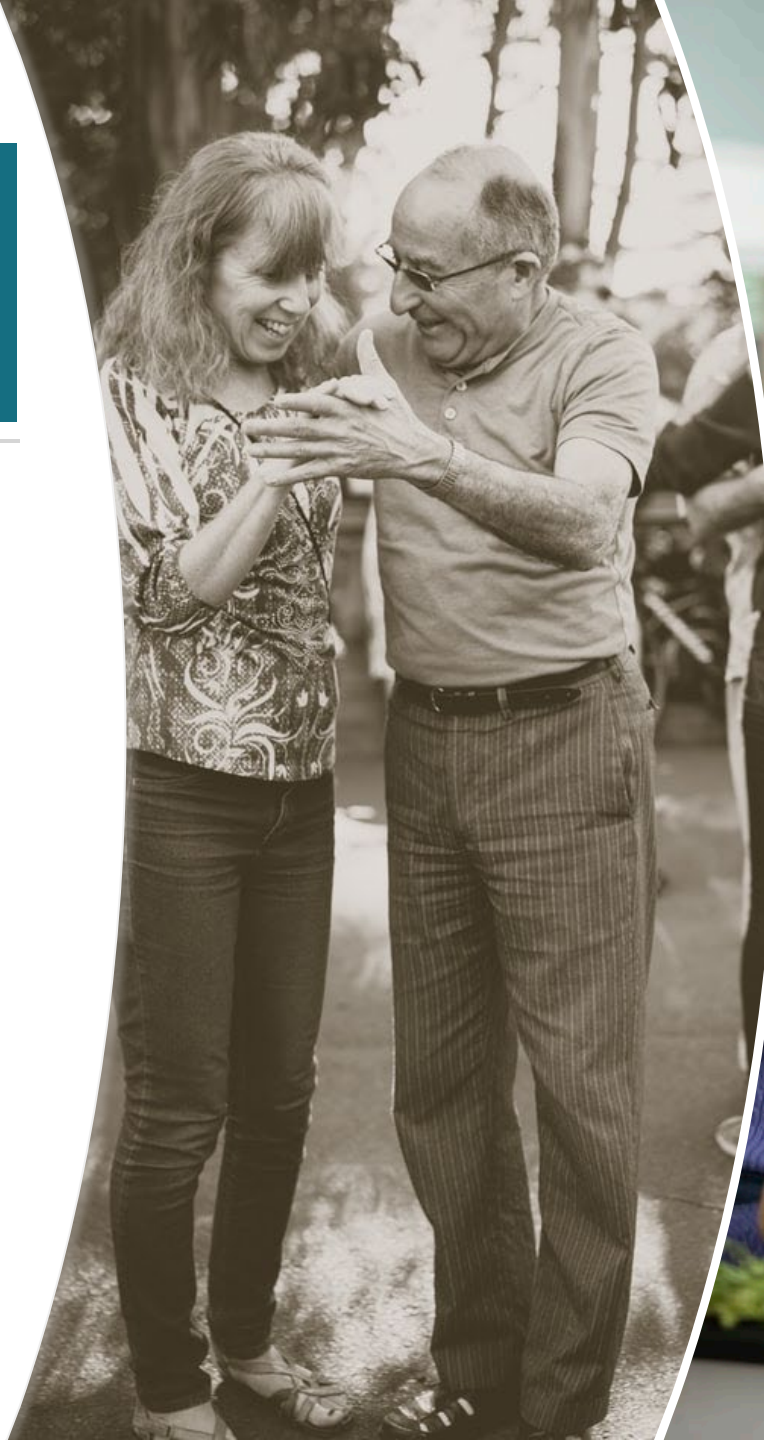
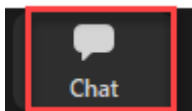
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**“Your father and I aren’t as wild as we used to be.
Does arm wrestling for the last slice of pizza
count as intimate physical contact?”**

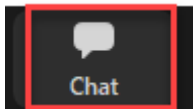
Ways to be Intimate

- Physical
- Emotional
- Spiritual



Healthy Relationships

- Key component of intimacy
- Relationships with one another are heavily influenced by “norms” that are socially learned
 - Power and control
- Center safety and balance



Q & A



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