

Crone Sexuality

by Pat Hanson



GOT SEXUALITY ISSUES? HIRE A COACH!

Staying alive sexually can be a challenge. For example, many women have some (or all) of the following concerns:

- *Does your self-image affect what you do (or don't) do in bed?*
- *Are you experiencing "dryness down there?" (as a doctor once asked me when I was forty-five.)*
- *Are you recently in relationship after years of living alone?*
- *Do you and your partner have uneven desire?*
- *Have Viagra-style ads set too-high expectations for intercourse?*
- *Do you have a "sexless relationship" — but don't want to?*

These are just a few of the concerns many of us crones may face. If "Stayin' Alive" sexually is something you'd like to do but physical, emotional or personal challenges impede you, help is on the way! For this column I turned to two crones in their early sixties who call themselves "sex coaches." Both of them

have over three decades of experience helping women to redefine and reinvent their sex lives.

Dr. Patti Britton, Ph.D., a board-certified clinical sexologist, has a private practice in Los Angeles.

Dr. Patti firmly believes that women and men of all ages have a birthright to experience sexual power, eroticism and pleasure. (Visit her site at www.yoursexcoach.com or www.sexcoachinstitute.com. Both websites

are gems, filled with sample activities for clients.)

Kat Forsythe, MSW, specializes in sex beyond midlife. She's worked — both individually and in groups — with women and men from their sixties to octogenarians and beyond. Kat pioneers programs for the rights of sexual expression for women and men in retirement and assisted living communities and in skilled nursing facilities. (Visit her site at www.getasecondwind.com)

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Both Dr. Patti and Kat are professionals, and prefer to be called “educators” or “coaches” rather than “therapists.” They avoid the term “therapy” because people often associate that term with pathology. Dr. Patti states, “the focus of therapy is processing feelings with an eye toward how things were in the past, mainly asking the question “why?” Sex coaching is a goal-oriented, results-driven client-centered approach to resolving sexual problems. It helps by asking: who, what, when, where, and how.”

Sexuality coaching is highly experiential. Clients are asked to try new things at home, with frequent check-in sessions. In summary, the sex coach pushes/guides/directs the client toward his or her own goals for sexual pleasure.

Dr. Patti says, “Old people don’t wither and die in their genitals. Although changes do occur — with drops in estrogen, progesterone and testosterone in both men and women — we’re born sexual and we die sexual.” Kat adds, “Much of it [my work] is about touch. I tell my clients to get touched: get a massage, a back rub, a manicure, a



Kat Forsythe specializes in sex beyond sixty.

pedicure, or ask for hugs.”

She believes that many people over sixty diagnosed as “depressed” are simply sensory-deprived, and that this lack of

touch is often the cause of so-called “sex-less marriages.”

Both coaches see negative self-talk about our aging bodies as a near-universal issue. Dr. Patti’s prescription often includes sessions in front of the mirror at home, empowering women to love what we see by making positive statements. Kat agrees. “I see many women whose biggest question is, ‘What do I do when I get old and feel ugly? How can I feel good enough to be naked in bed?’”

Kat’s answer is “*if it’s to be, it’s up to me.*” She helps women learn to celebrate their wrinkles, and encourages women to join groups where their wisdom is honored.

If the client is inspired to make a change in hairstyle or makeup, or start a walking program, or go to the gym rather than stay in bed in the morning, a coach checks in to encourage, applaud, and support the positive changes. If the client doesn’t follow through, the coach tried to help her discover what’s holding her back.

Speaking of exercise: the evidence is in. We now know men who masturbate have lower rates of prostate cancer. Like-

wise those “Kegels” that we were taught to strengthen the vaginal muscles still work late in life. Plus, all kinds of exercise (sensual or not) release endorphins and improve mood, both inside the bedroom and out of it.

Many problems are caused by communication issues. Many older couples need to be encouraged to communicate positively with each other. Dr. Patti: “Sharing what feels good and giving positive regard to our [sexual] partners are issues that transcend gender and orientation.”

Coaches suggest words that are softer and gentler (or in some cases more explicit), for asking for specific needs to be met. We often may need to tell each other about readiness for sex. “What often happens is that without ample stimulation and arousal, *she* may not be ready from a lubrication point of view, thus it’s going to be not pleasant; and *he* may be suffering from performance anxiety with too much emphasis on penetrative sex.”

In other words, “Am I aroused enough? *This* is what I need and want for

you to turn me on and keep me turned on so I can accommodate you.” In terms of vaginal dryness and thinning of the vaginal walls that occur in close to two-thirds of older women, both Kat and Dr. Patti discuss changes in sexual positions that can prevent pain, as well as safe, healthy, natural lubricants without glycerin (which can cause yeast infections).

Dr. Patti spoke of one couple, who had been married for over thirty years, who both recently retired. Suddenly they found themselves profoundly disappointed in each other and in the relationship itself. Dr. Patti helped them see that they were experiencing “too much face

time, and not enough space time.” In their case, distance became the treatment that allowed them the breathing room to desire intimacy.

Other Crone-ish Sexperts to check out

• *Betty Dodson*
dodsonandross.com

• *Dell Williams*
evesgarden.com

• *Gina Ogden*
www.ginaogden.com

• *Linda Savage*
goddesstherapy.com

• *Joan Price*
www.joanprice.com

Dr. Patti sees her coaching role as a applying first-aid to ailing relationships: applying encouragement and introducing information and tools to reframe negative thinking. The “medicine” she prescribes is a series of behaviors designed to



Sex coach Dr. Patti Britton

create excitement through change. The goal was is get back on track by re-inspiring and rejuvenating the relationship. Kat says that perhaps a third of her clients use sex toys, vibrators, and experiment with fetishes like leather in their sexual play. In fact she’s designed a special foam nerf football vibrator with a slit in it for a more gentle experience. Dr. Patti’s website sells a variety of such products.

Another common issue is “LD,” loss of desire, or “UD,” uneven desire. Both may be related to communication difficulties or physical changes resulting from lower hormones. Both coaches avoid framing sexuality in overly medical terms. For example, one of Dr. Patti’s couples is in a new marriage. She’s in her 70s, he in his early 60s. In this new relationship, he stimulated her g-spot and she “wet the bed.” Rather than be concerned about this, they got turned on, and were having sex four or five times a

week. When she went to her doctor for a checkup, she was told that she was suffering from two abnormalities: urinary incontinence and PGAD: “persistent genital arousal disorder.” Her wanted to prescribe drugs to slow down her libido. It wasn’t

until this couple found Dr. Dr. Patti that they realized they were not “sick” and became fully comfortable with their own levels of sexual expression. Dr. Patti encouraged the woman to brag about her experience in a blog!

All in all, the secret to stay-in’ alive sexually is pretty much the same as thriving in other ways: physically, emotionally and spiritually. Perhaps the most important ingredient is to smile. Let’s lighten up and laugh about the idiosyncricities we see as we look in that mirror and at each other. ☺

— PAT HANSON, PH.D., *sixty-four, has been a health and sexuality educator for over thirty years. She is currently working on a book: Hopelessly Heterosexual? Memoirs of an Aging But Not Fading Sex Educator.*