TITLE: Sexual activity and function in middle aged and older women
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INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVE: Data on the sexual experience of aging women are scant and vary widely. This analysis examines the prevalence and predictors of sexual activity and function in women between the ages of 40 and 69.

METHODS: The Reproductive Risk Factors for Incontinence Study at Kaiser (RRISK) is a cohort study of 2109 racially and ethnically diverse women ages 40-69 randomly selected from long-term Kaiser Permanente members. Subjects completed a questionnaire on frequency of and satisfaction with sexual activity, comorbidities and quality of life. Four sexual problem domains (lack of interest, inability to relax, difficulty in arousal or orgasm) were assessed, with problem defined as a rating of ‘somewhat of a problem’ or greater in any problem domain. Logistic regression was used to identify correlates of sexual activity and problems. Our analysis included 1732 women.

RESULTS: Mean age (±SD) was 54.2 (±8) and 73% of women were sexually active. Of the 1272 sexually active subjects, 86% had sex at least once a month, 73% were at least somewhat satisfied and 64% reported one or more of the four sexual problems. In multivariate analysis, sexual activity in the past 12 months was positively correlated with younger age, married or in a significant relationship, at least some college education, BMI<25 kg/m², current or prior alcohol use and higher score on the mental health section of the SF-36 (all p<0.05). Monthly or greater sexual activity was associated with younger age, having a partner, BMI<25 kg/m² and prior hysterectomy (all p<0.05). Satisfaction with sexual activity was associated with older age, African American race and higher SF-36 score in the mental health domain (all p<0.05) and sexual problems were associated with being married or in a significant relationship, higher education, poor health, history of hot flashes and lower SF-36 score in the mental health domain (all p<0.05).

CONCLUSIONS: Our results demonstrate that middle aged and older women continue to engage in satisfying sexual activity with a minority experiencing problems. While sexual activity may become more satisfying as women age some of the issues associated with aging can adversely affect sexual function.