



# Health and Social Care Promotion Materials that Focus on Intimacy and Sexuality in the Third Age

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## Module: Sexuality and the third age

### Unit 3: Active Ageing

#### Introduction

Active ageing has become a central feature of social and health policy across Europe in recent years. Building on earlier ideas which sought to promote successful ageing, active ageing is defined by WHO as:

‘the process of optimizing opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. It applies to both individuals and population groups.’

Such an approach to social and health policies, and indeed health and social care practices, is designed to enhance the quality of life for older people and the well-being of ageing citizens. Furthermore, the success of an active ageing strategy is dependent upon the recognition that ‘activity’ should be defined by the older person themselves; the chosen pursuits of older people should be actively supported; diversity should be recognised and respected and the participation of older people in decision making should be maximised. Central to much of what active ageing might seek to achieve for older people is the notion of continuity. Continuity theory is highly suggestive of enabling older people to maintain values, beliefs and practices which are consistent with the life that has been lived.

With the acceptance of such ideas in the ascendancy in recent decades, attention has shifted to the practices of those working in health and social care services and how these might reflect and provide support to an active ageing agenda. More recently Ruth Katz has developed a model aimed at promoting the well-being of all older people, but particularly those who are frail or require high support needs. The model encourages those working in health and social care to recognise the physical, social and psychological needs of older people. Such needs include the maintenance of personal relationships; humour and pleasure; a sense of self.

Sexuality is increasingly viewed as an important component of the active ageing movement. The promotion of continuity in personal and intimate relationships; practices which seek to support the maintenance of a sense of self; the active involvement of older people in making decisions about their own sexual life are all consistent with the active ageing agenda.



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## Key Messages

- Active ageing is an important movement across Europe
- Active ageing and continuity are viewed as essential features of a healthy old age
- Sexuality and intimacy are important parts of an active later life

## Learning outcomes

At the end of this unit students are expected to:

1. Have developed a critical awareness of the notion of active ageing.
2. Understand the importance of sexuality and intimacy to us as we age and how these aspects of our life might be challenged.

## Content

### Reflective exercises

- I. How can health and social care professionals work to promote and support an active ageing agenda for older people?
- II. What are the challenges to an active ageing approach for older people?
- III. Consider your own sexuality and intimate relationships, how important are they to your own well-being?
- IV. How might these be challenged as you get older? (Consider the physical, social and psychological aspects of ageing)

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