

A guide to sex at 50 - and beyond



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Published on: September 23, 2014 | Last Updated: September 23, 2014 5:41 PM EST

MONTREAL — The language in *The Sex Bible for People Over 50: The Complete Guide to Sexual Love for Mature Couples* is clear and direct – and, in places, graphic.

It reflects the spirit of its author, Laurie Betito, a (50-year-old) Montreal clinical psychologist with a specialty in sex therapy and the

host of Passion, a long-running radio talk show about sex, love and relationships. “My whole career has been about having frank, open, un-censored discussions about a topic that’s not always easy to confront,” as she observes in the introduction to the just-published book.

For couples satisfied with their sex life, sex is not the most important thing in the relationship – but when a couple’s sex life is unfulfilling, it “usually ends up turning into a larger issue that can threaten the relationship.”

Betito sat down with The Gazette in her Montreal office recently to talk about her practice, about sex and about her new book.

The book is called The Sex Bible for People Over 50. But I have read it – and it is way more than a sex book.

Yes it is. It is a relationship book. That is why there are a lot of couple chapters.

There are changes that happen as a natural part of the aging process. The information is presented in a straightforward way – my voice is there, my examples – and it comes across as very validating. The book offers solutions for couples who are having issues but don’t talk to each other about what’s happening.

We often hear that sexual desire declines with age. But in your book, you say that’s a myth.

There is a difference between interest and spontaneous desire for sex. Spontaneous desire for sex diminishes with age, but your interest in

sex does not.

Many women experience more, not less, sexual desire with age. A majority of studies have shown that the quality of sex actually improves with age. People report more satisfaction. The satisfaction comes from the encounter. It is less orgasm-driven. For men, orgasm becomes less of a necessity.

Men, in general, maintain sexual desire throughout their lives but, in some cases, it diminishes. This tends to have nothing to do with his partner, but with other issues – including a fear of erectile dysfunction or an underlying medical condition – or the fact that he is taking medication that affects libido and sexual response, including anti-depressants, anti-hypertensives and cholesterol-lowering drugs. Medication can affect arousal, desire and ejaculation: One side-effect of anti-depressants, for instance, is to delay ejaculation. And blood-pressure medication affects arousal.

How then does sex change with age?

The principal ways in which sex changes with age is that it takes more direct stimulation to be aroused. With women, sex toys can be aides. With men, it might take longer to get erections. With women, vaginal dryness and atrophy can become bothersome, but there are simple solutions (these are described in the book and include estrogen-based prescriptions as well as over-the-counter lubricants).

Men tend to place more importance on intimacy, touch and affection as they age. Many say that intercourse is no longer the necessity it was when they were younger. There's more focus on sensuality and foreplay, which makes sex even better.

I give talks at seniors' residences: Many people are still sexually active into their 80s ... There is no expiration date in our brain.

The book includes details – written as well as visual – on sexual positions and on aides, including sex toys and pillows and foam wedges for people whose bad knees or hips or back problems are an issue.

Sex at 65 isn't the same as it was at 25, but that doesn't mean it can't be the best ever. "Just as you may now need reading glasses to enjoy reading a good book," Betito writes, "so, too, can you enjoy great sex with some simple modifications."

Why the photos, some of which are explicit? (The models are California-based friends with benefits.)

To make the book more appealing to the reader. Part of why the pictures are there is that the feedback I get is that a lot of guys don't read. The book is visually pleasing, which means it will more likely be read by men.

The photos are instructional. They are not there just to titillate. Sometimes it can be hard to describe a position: I wanted an easy reference guide ... a modern version of *The Joy of Sex* (an erotic manual for couples first published in 1972). People are surprised at first to see the photos, but they have commented that they think they're very classy.

Do you think most people understand the importance of sex in a couple's relationship?

I think people do get it. But I think we need to redefine sexuality. When we say sex, immediately people think of intercourse. But it's not the most important thing. Touch, affection, kissing, holding: All are parts of sexuality.

You can have a couple with the desire to just connect closely: It doesn't have to include the penis in the vagina. Intimacy is good. Arousal is healthy. Yet people are embarrassed – and worry they can't perform. But he can still feel pleasure if his penis is flaccid. Where does that leave couples? Afraid of triggering a sexual response, they can turn away from each other. That's the sad part. I see couples who want to reconnect; that's usually because of the urging of one partner in the couple.

What relationship issue do you see most commonly in your practice?

A difference in libido between partners. It's not that their interest or arousal goes away; it's that what's missing for one partner is the spontaneous desire for sex ... One of the big myths is that great sex is spontaneous.

With women, though, many things pile up in our brains. If I plan to go out with a girlfriend to dinner on a Tuesday night, for instance, I will have dinner ready for the family before I go and the lunches made for the next day. But if I go out and know that I'm coming home to a messy house and things that need doing, that will preoccupy me the entire evening.

In the acknowledgment section, you express gratitude to your parents for their support – but note that your dad doesn't listen to your radio show.

My dad says, 'I am proud of my little girl, but I really don't want to listen to her talk about blow jobs.' My mother, on the other hand, listens any chance she gets. And she was the conservative one in the family.

This interview has been edited and condensed.

Laurie Betito will be signing copies of *The Sex Bible for People Over 50: The Complete Guide to Sexual Love for Mature Couples* (Fair Winds Press/Quiver, 159 pages, \$21.99) 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. at Boutique Séduction, 5220 Metropolitan Blvd. E.

Passion airs weeknights from 10 to 11 p.m. on CJAD 800. Go to www.drlaurie.com to learn more.

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