



A seasoned woman knows what she wants and how to get it. **Cathy Minz** explores how women evolve into their 50s and learn to live with passion.

SEX

AND THE SEASONED WOMAN

Does getting older mean losing interest in living a passionate life? Are women in the second half of their lives condemned to wither alone exhausted from their roles as doting mothers and reeling from the aftermath of menopause? Surely, this greatly treasured woman, the one with greying hair and reading glasses, who enjoys baking goodies, wearing more sensible shoes and going out for ladies' lunches with her girlfriends, cannot be enjoying secret pleasures under her carefully hand stitched quilt, can she? Oh yes, yes, yes she can! And, it has never been more obvious that this same iconic figure can also find bliss on top of the quilt with the lights on or on a moonlit shoreline, because she is enjoying the best sex of her life – and she's over 50!

But how could this be? Her youthfulness is slowing waning, the powerful hormones that gave her the urge to mate and have babies are fading, and her tautness is turning soft. Clearly, something else is going on. There are other factors affecting "seasoned women."

Author Gaily Sheehy, bestselling author

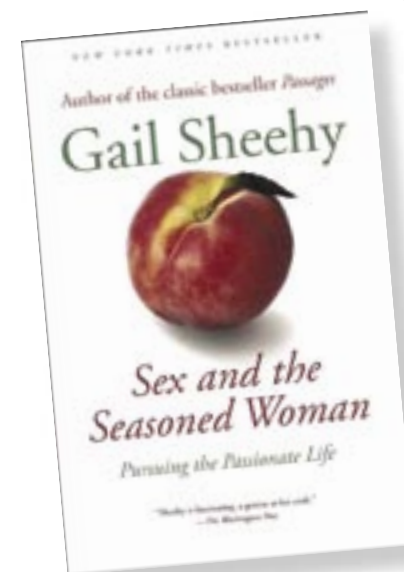
of 16 books including the groundbreaking book *Passages: Predictable Crises in Adult Life*, has written *Sex and the Seasoned Woman – Pursuing the Passionate Life*. Illuminating the opportunities and challenges women face regarding dating, sex, marriage, divorce and aging relationships with true stories and her trademark "passages" philosophy, she illuminates the many stages women transcend in their second adulthood.

She writes: "A seasoned woman is spicy. She has been marinated in life experience....Assured, alluring, and resourceful. She is less likely to have an agenda than a young woman -- no

biological clock tick-tocking beside her lover's bed, no campaign to lead him to the altar, no rescue fantasies. The seasoned woman knows who she is. She could be any one of us as long as she is committed to living fully and passionately in the second half of her life, despite failures and false starts."

As seasoned women, we seek fulfilment in career, family, love and sex. We want everything and we are still healthy enough to get it. Whether it's within a secure relationship or independently with a new partner, women who have grown to accept and appreciate their true selves, can revel in ridiculously satisfying

sexual relationships. With no pressure to procreate and the daily stress of raising children diminishing as the years go by, a woman now has the opportunity to seek out her passions, whatever they may be.



We have outgrown our former selves who survived by pleasing others that protected and defined us: parents, husband, family and bosses. We now crave mastering our lives and we have the life experience to decide what is really important. We seek greater confidence and yearn to control our physical and emotional worlds. We care less about being liked and more about being authentic which allows us the freedom to pursue our passions – especially in the bedroom.

There is a logical reason to revitalize your sexuality in mid-life. When it comes to sex: use it or lose it! In other words, if you go without sex for a while, you'll lose both the desire and sexual musculature. Conversely, the more sex you have, the more you want. So how do you improve your desires if you're stuck in a rut with a gloomy partner or you haven't had good sex for a while?

Spicing it up after 50

Ms. Sheehy writes: "There is a strong symbiosis between a woman's bodily self-image and her sexual response as she gets

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older. Women who keep themselves in shape, who discover a good vibrator sooner rather than later, who have a little collection of erotica to keep themselves stimulated when they're without a man, are much more likely to tell me they were ready when the opportunity presented itself."

Reconnecting with our passionate self, the one we left behind when we discovered the harsh realities and responsibilities of our first adulthood can be a challenge but the rewards of rediscovery are fruitful. Experimenting with new sexual positions and exhilarating romantic locales, taking up dancing together and even engaging in sex with other couples are all things couples do to rekindle their lust.

While toys, videos, and erotica exist to enhance the sexual realm, reviving your lust for a long-time partner or seeking out a new one can help spark new desires. "Recognizing that as we are all pedaling at a much faster pace, with a cell phone held to one ear and a PDA at hand, it requires a more conscious commitment to carve out time for true intimacy with our partners," writes Sheehy. Take time to rediscover your inner desires with your partner. Activities that allow you to surrender your inhibition and control to your partner can improve trust and help stimulate a natural intimacy.

To get back her joie de vivre after years of sexual inactivity, a woman can reacquire herself with her own body by getting in better shape physically and stimulating her mind with erotic fantasies. Of course, as Sheehy explains, a Pilot Light Lover will also do the trick nicely. A "Pilot Light Lover" is a transitional partner who reignites a woman's capability for love and sex. In midlife a single woman who has just started dating feels vulnerable. Usually a great lover but not a good choice for a life partner, this man sets alight feelings of bliss and passion but most likely won't last long. Sheehy explains in her book: "While the rush of a Romantic Renaissance can be as intense as romantic love when we were young, we also possess half a lifetime of experience, and that gives us the ability to manage the delicious and dangerous turbulence." She also warns not to

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make any life-altering decisions during this ecstatic phase – it's much like being drunk with love. No answers will come from this lover, progress toward becoming a seasoned woman comes from within.

While Gail Sheehy has spent decades researching life stages, emotional crises, social attitudes and lifestyles of men and women across North America, most of us rely only on our own personal experiences, those of our friends who are willing to share and what we have learned from studying books written by highly-regarded professionals. At 45 and recently divorced, I have freshly embarked on my own journey to pursue a passionate life. What have I learned from my research?

Smart women enjoy sex

While every woman is capable of a fulfilling sex life, smart women take particular care in engaging in responsible, satisfying sex. Sexual gratification is good for the body, the mind and the spirit. Sex gets your blood flowing which is great for circulation. Natural 'feel good' chemicals are released into the brain (or so I'm told) stimulating brain function and keeping one youthful. Whether sex is a fantasy or a reality, exercising the brain is supposed to help prevent brain atrophy and Alzheimer's Disease.

Smart women also know that intimacy in any relationship is key to its survival. Sex produces more than temporary gratification. It's much deeper than that. Sex creates a bond of intimacy between two people. Like glue, intimacy holds two people together in a relationship. If there is no glue, there needs to be another reason to stay together. Because

of this, I surmise that long-time marriages that continue without sex and the related intimacy fail.

Love and sex

While many of us were taught to have sex only with men we are in love with, love and sex don't necessarily go hand-in-hand. Sex without love is just sex, good or bad, but sex together with love is immensely satisfying on many levels. But the brain can play tricks on you. Be warned that lust and many other emotions can masquerade as love – but only for a little while.


Authenticity

Learning about our own prejudices, attitudes and morals is the first step to choosing which ones we want to keep in later life. While growing up, we learned from our parents, our peers and our mentors. Awareness is key to consciously choosing our passions and becoming authentic. Everything else is pretense.

Seasoned women

One luminous Sunday afternoon, while flitting through the cars in a big-box store parking lot, my fetching man-friend told me he thought "grown women are better lovers." He asked me what I thought of his revelation. I pondered his question and replied, "Because we have nothing to prove. We know who we are and what we want. We are comfortable in our own skin and it shows."

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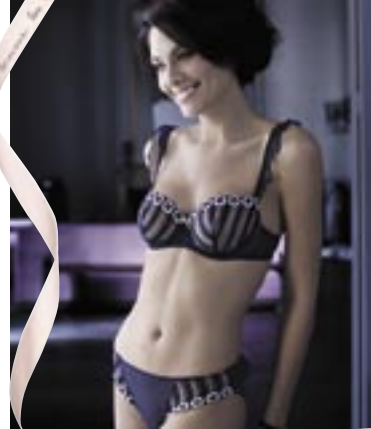
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