



# UNDERSTANDING FACTORS THAT MAY IMPACT EMOTIONAL AND SEXUAL INTIMACY

## WORKSHOP HANDOUT

### DISEASE RELATED CHANGES

- Lesions in the central nervous system that can affect women and men – *reduced interest/arousal (i.e., vaginal lubrication; erections), sensory changes or loss of sensation, difficulty reaching orgasm*
- Symptoms of MS that can interfere with sexual interest and activity – *fatigue, pain, stiffness, bladder/bowel problems, depression, cognitive changes*
- Some medications used to treat symptoms – *bladder medications, antidepressants, anti-spasticity medications*

### PSYCHOSOCIAL FACTORS

- Stress, anxiety, depression, and other emotional issues
- Attitudes about sexuality and disability; changes in self-esteem
- Changes in roles within your partnership that impact self-concept and self-esteem

### STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES

- Start talking to each other – keeping in mind that silence is easily misinterpreted as not caring, or no longer feeling attracted, or being attracted to someone else!
  - If you need help communicating, consider talking to a counselor with expertise in MS
- Bring the problems to the attention of your healthcare providers
- Be open to doing things differently – the more open you are to being creative, flexible, using adaptive strategies and tools, the more enjoyable your intimacy is likely to be
- Take time to learn how MS has changed the way your body feels and responds – and then teach your partner what feels good and what doesn't
- Nurture the emotional connection that provides a foundation for sexual intimacy

