

“Not tonight darling”

Loss of interest in sex - the facts

‘Low libido’, ‘loss of libido’, ‘impaired sexual interest’ and ‘low sex drive’ are all ways of saying that **someone has lost interest in having sex**. For some people this might mean having no interest in sex at all. This can be a problem if it makes the person feel distressed or if it causes problems in a relationship.

Loss of interest in sex is not unusual - 40% of women and 30% of men have no interest in sex at some time in their adult lives (*Journal of American Medicine*).

It can also be a short term problem that goes away, for example when a person becomes more relaxed.

What loss of libido is NOT.

Loss of interest in sex is sometimes confused with not having the physical signs of sexual excitement (e.g. not getting an erection or not producing vaginal lubrication)- but it is different. Problems like not getting an erection can occur despite someone wanting to have sex.

What causes impaired sexual interest?

Impaired sexual interest can have many causes, both **physical** and **emotional**. Some of the more common ones include:

Physical Causes

- Physical stress e.g. being over worked and exhausted.
- Excessive drug use (e.g. alcohol or cannabis)
- Certain prescription medications
- Ageing; most peoples' sexual appetite and preference change as they grow older.
- Poor diet
- Physical illness
- Pain
- Changes in hormones

Emotional Causes

- Emotional stress e.g. being bored, feeling hassled at work or at home, or being affected by some trauma
- Being depressed, very anxious or feeling bad about yourself
- Feeling guilty about sex: sadly many people have grown up with the idea that it is wrong to have sexual feelings and desires.
- Having a poor body image
- Problems in a relationship
- Poor sex education
- The memory of negative sexual experiences
- The thought that you are going to fail in some way
- Fear of pregnancy
- Fear of getting or passing on a sexually transmitted disease
- Loss of interest in sex may also occur if you, or your partner, have another sexual problem that stops sex from being enjoyable.

Treatment

Your GP will assess you to try to determine whether the cause of your loss of libido is physical or emotional.

He or she may change any medication you are on or prescribe you medication. You may also be referred to see a specialist.

If your doctor thinks that there may be an emotional cause, s/he may suggest that you see a clinical psychologist or a counsellor. This might mean being referred to the psychosexual clinic.

The information leaflet on sexual problems explains more about the psychosexual clinic.

Self help

There are some things you can do that might improve your interest in sex:

Manage your stress – Try not to take on more than you have to. See if you can improve ways in which you relax and/or get time for yourself. How could you give yourself a treat? If something is worrying you, can you find someone to talk to?

More info online: <http://www.mindtools.com/>

More self help...

Diet – Eating healthily can improve your sex drive whilst eating stodgy food can decrease it. Also certain vitamins and minerals are important in balancing hormones. This means that eating a diet rich in these can have a positive effect on sex drive and sexual health.

More info online: www.bodyfoods.com (click 'guides' and then article on low libido).

Alcohol - Limiting your alcohol intake can also help.

Exercise – As well as being a great stress buster and giving you confidence, exercises like jogging, cycling or brisk walking can improve sexual health. Others like t'ai chi or yoga can make you more positive about your body and stimulate sexual feelings.

Talk to your partner- sharing your worries about sex can lead to better understanding and support from your partner.

More info online: www.thesite.org (click on 'sex and relationships' then 'couples', then 'life as a couple' then 'communicating as a couple')

Useful Resources

Finding out more about your body, sex and sexual health may improve your confidence about it. The resources listed below may be helpful.

Books about sexual problems include:

Men and Sex - Bernard Zilbergeld - Fontana . A comprehensive and witty book that exposes many modern sexual myths very well

Woman's Experience of Sex - Sheila Kitzinger - Penguin

The Mirror Within - Anne Dickson - Quartet Both books deal with sexuality from the woman's point of view.

Educational:

The Good Vibrations Guide to Sex. Cathy Winks and Anne Semans

Let's talk about sex: Growing up, changing bodies, sex and sexual health, Robie Harris. Written for children – but also helpful for adults!

Helpful website include:

Sexuality and sexual health:

www.engenderhealth.org/ (under 'resources' click 'online courses' then 'sexuality and sexual health').

Female loss of sexual interest:

<http://adam.about.com/encyclopedia/001952.htm>

Male loss of sexual interest:

<http://www.thesite.org> (click on 'sex and relationships' then 'couples', then 'relationship issues' then 'low male libido'.)

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