

Libido - medical issues

Libido, which means sex drive or the desire for sex, varies dramatically from one person to the next. It also varies depending on a person's preferences and life circumstances. Libido can be affected by medical conditions, hormone levels, medications, lifestyle and relationship problems.

Unless you're worried about your sex drive or it's causing problems between you and your partner, you don't need to seek professional help.

Sexual desire in women

Some of the medical conditions that can cause a woman's sex drive to lessen include:

- **Menopause** – because of the drop in sex hormones
- **Dyspareunia** – which is painful sex
- **Vaginismus** – the involuntary (not under the woman's conscious control) clamping of the vaginal muscles, making penetration difficult, if not impossible
- **Pregnancy, childbirth and breastfeeding** – because of changes in hormone levels, especially the hormone prolactin
- **Infections** – such as thrush or urinary tract infections
- **Problems reaching orgasm** – the woman can't reach orgasm or reach it within the time wanted by her and her partner.

Sexual desire in men

Some of the medical conditions that can cause a man's sex drive to lessen include:

- **Male menopause** – as a man ages, his testosterone levels slowly fall. Some researchers think this is linked to a lessened libido
- **Impotence** – not being able to achieve or maintain an erection needed to have sex
- **Premature ejaculation** – a lack of control over ejaculation causing it to happen sooner than the man or his partner would want
- **Retarded ejaculation** – not being able to reach orgasm.

Illness can lessen sex drive

Some physical illnesses and medical conditions can cause a loss of sex drive, including:

- Anaemia
- Kidney failure
- Hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid gland)
- Depression.

Medications can affect libido

A lessened sex drive can be a side effect of some medications. For example, some antidepressants have a known side effect of lowering libido. Some women feel they have less interest in sex when taking contraceptives that contain hormones, such as the pill.

If you're worried about the effect of medication on your sex drive, you can talk to a doctor about changing medication or trying alternative options.

Other issues affecting libido

Other factors that can affect libido include:

- Tiredness
- Lack of time
- Sexual incompatibility
- Lack of privacy
- Some medications.

Diagnosis of loss of libido

If you've lost interest in sex for no apparent reason, a doctor can help find the cause by carrying out a range of tests, including:

- Physical examination
- Medical history
- Blood tests.

Treatment for loss of libido

Treatment for a lessened sex drive depends on the cause, but can include:

- Treatment for any underlying medical condition, such as depression (although a side effect of some antidepressants is a lessened libido)
- Counselling
- Stress management
- Hormone therapy.

Where to get help

- Doctor
- Family Planning Victoria Tel. 1800 013 952 or (03) 9257 0100
- Sex therapist
- Psychologist
- Gynaecologist
- Urologist

Things to remember

- Sex drive varies dramatically from one person to the next and even for the same person, depending on what they prefer and their life circumstances.
- If you've lost interest in sex for no apparent reason, talking to a doctor can help.
- Some medical conditions and medications can affect a person's desire for sex.
- Treatment for a lessened libido can include treating any underlying medical condition, hormone therapy, stress management and counselling.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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