
Libido

Summary

- Sex drive varies a lot from one person to the next and even for the same person, depending on what they prefer and their life circumstances.
 - If a couple is having problems in other areas of their relationship, their sex life may be affected.
 - Some medical conditions and medication 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.
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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.

Many new couples will go through an early period of having a lot of sex that slows down over time. On the other hand, a busy life can leave some people too tired or preoccupied to even think about sex. Unless you are worried about your sex drive or it is causing problems between you and your partner, you do not need to seek professional help.

What is a 'normal' libido?

There is no 'normal' when it comes to how often you have sex. Some people have sex (or feel like having sex) every day, others may have sex once a year or not at all. It all depends on what you prefer and your life circumstances.

What causes a lowered libido?

As well as medical conditions and the side effects of some medications, there are a number of other reasons for a lessened sex drive, including:

- performance anxiety – premature ejaculation or painful sex can make a person avoid sex out of fear that it could happen again
- fatigue – feeling too tired for sex is common
- lack of time and privacy – the demands of work and home life may not leave enough time for intimacy and sex
- familiarity – a couple's desire for sex tends to lessen over time
- sexual incompatibility – sexual desire can be affected if a person constantly wants more sex than their partner or wants a type of sexual activity that their partner is not comfortable with
- sexual turn-offs – sexual attraction to your partner may lessen if there are changes in their physical appearance, such as excessive weight gain
- depression – can cause tiredness, lack of motivation, feeling sad and withdrawing from activities, including sex
- stress – researchers have found stress hormones can lessen sexual desire and response
- exercise – either too much or too little can cause a loss of sex drive
- traumatic experience – such as sexual harassment, sexual abuse or rape, can lessen sexual desire.

Can relationship issues affect libido?

A reduced sex drive may also be caused by relationship problems. If a couple is having problems in other areas of their relationship, their sex life may be affected.

If you and your partner are not satisfied with your sex life, you can seek professional counselling to:

- learn communication skills to improve the overall quality of your relationship
- try to resolve underlying problems, such as tension
- learn how to increase intimacy and physical affection without having sex
- learn different sexual techniques
- talk about sexual desires and fantasies together
- learn strategies to boost sex drive, such as masturbating and fantasising.

Can health issues affect libido?

A reduced sex drive can be a side effect of some medication. 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.

Some physical illnesses and medical conditions can cause a loss of sex drive, including anaemia, kidney failure, hypothyroidism (underactive thyroid gland) and depression.

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

Conditions affecting female libido

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 – 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 cannot reach orgasm or reach it within the time wanted by her and her partner.

Conditions affecting male libido

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

- hormone changes – as a man ages, his testosterone levels slowly fall, which some researchers think is linked to a lessened libido
- impotence – not being able to achieve or maintain an erection needed for 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.

How is lowered libido diagnosed?

If you have 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.

How is lowered libido treated?

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

- Your **GP (doctor)**
- Sex therapist
- **Psychologist**
- Gynaecologist
- **Urologist**

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Family Planning Victoria

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