

## Boosting Low Sexual Desire

For many couples, sex is a way to reconnect, have some fun together, and recharge for the daily demands of life. Sex can take many forms, but the important thing is that it is a shared and mutually enjoyable erotic experience. As good as it can be, some people lose their desire for sex. Sometimes they know exactly why their desire dropped, sometimes they don't. Either way, if you would like to, you can find that lost desire. And if you have never had an especially strong sex drive but would like more of one, you can work on that, too.

Sexual desire is influenced by many factors, so you may need to consider how any or all of these are affecting you. This exploration will involve considering a number of questions to figure out what is most relevant for you. Take your time as you consider your answers and be willing to circle back around. You may also find it helpful to check in with your physician(s) and/or a sex therapist to assess how the physical, psychological, and relational are influencing each other. You will probably find that the process of working on your sex drive will also benefit you and your relationship in other ways.

*The first question we need to ask here is: Would you like to have more sexual desire?* Or is it mostly because your partner wants you to have more desire? While there is always a place for generosity in relationships, it's hard to want something you don't actually want, so what would help *you* want it more? This can be a big question with multiple answers, so really think about it.

If you used to desire sex with your partner and would like it again, then start by thinking about when your desire for sex changed.

- Was it sudden or gradual?
- What preceded that change—in you, in your partner, in your relationship, in your life overall?
- What has happened since then?
- Has your desire been consistently reduced or does it come and go?
- Has your desire for solo sexual activity also changed?
- Has a desire change happened with previous partners?

Start gathering these clues to help you solve the puzzle.

### Desire Downers

Let's now look at the usual suspects to see if any of them played a role in your reduced desire. Sexual desire can be negatively influenced by many things, including:

Physical conditions: generally declining health, endocrine disorders (including diabetes and low testosterone or thyroid), cardiovascular disease, and cancer. Some medications (especially the SSRI antidepressants) can decrease desire, so speak with your physician if you suspect a physical cause.

Psychological conditions: stress, anxiety, depression (including post-partum depression), body image discomfort, addiction, sexual abuse, and grief.

Relationship factors: disagreements or conflict about sexual and/or nonsexual matters, insufficient emotional intimacy, infidelity, reduced attraction, etc.

Sexual problem in yourself and/or your partner: difficulty achieving orgasm, erectile difficulties, premature ejaculation, pain during sex, and negative or limiting sexual beliefs.

## Re-Light that Spark

Once you have some sense of what has been sapping your sex drive, you are in a better position to begin to address it. You can work with your physician on any medical concerns, including problematic treatments, that are interfering with your sex life. A therapist can work with you on psychological matters and general relationship issues. A trained sex therapist can help you with sexual problems, as well as on how all of the above interact to affect your sex life.

For example, a sex therapist may help you to notice when you do have sexual thoughts—when and under what circumstances? What kinds of thoughts? How do you feel about them? What happens next? If your sexual thoughts get lost, a sex therapist can help you figure out why and then how to allow those thoughts to build.

You may find that it helps to put some effort into cultivating desire by focusing on those passing sexual thoughts, as well as engaging in exercises to create them in the first place. You may work on this alone and/or with your partner. Some of these exercises will be purely mental, whereas others will involve trying new things, but at a comfortable pace. A sex therapist would probably work with both you and your partner to help you find better ways of working together on this.

Perhaps most importantly, especially for busy people in long-term relationships, sometimes desire follows sexual activity—sometimes we need to start some erotic activity (with a partner or alone) and let desire build from that stimulation. As we get into it, we find ourselves enjoying it more and more.

Of course, it's much easier to desire desirable sex, so we need to keep our sex lives fun and satisfying. This works better if you make your relationship and your sex life a high priority, not the last priority. Keep it interesting by investing the necessary time, mental energy, and creativity into it—and ask your partner to do the same. While it can be great to have a lot of sex, for most couples, quality is more important than quantity—and way better than a lot of so-so sex.

Couples who are able to maintain good sex over the years and decades are able to do so by communicating well with each other about both sexual and nonsexual matters. They are comfortable with their own and their partner's sexual desires and fantasies and are able to negotiate the differences. They are flexible about what the sexual encounter will entail and they avoid performance pressure. Sex becomes more about the shared experience than about some measurable end point. Couples that connect well sexually tend to also be happier overall, so your sex life is worth investing in.

If you feel disconnected from sexual desire or from your partner, then be willing to work on it. You'll probably be happy that you did.

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