



## Loss of Libido in Men

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Men don't like to talk about it; neither do their partners. But loss of libido in men or inhibited sexual desire stresses a marriage more than any other sexual dysfunction, according to Barry McCarthy, co-author of *Rekindling Desire: A Step by Step Program to Help Low-Sex and No-Sex Marriages*.

Losing interest in sex may not be as common an occurrence for men as it is for women: It affects about 15% to 16% of men, and at least double that many women. "But when men lose interest in sex it scares them more than women -- their masculinity is so linked to their sexuality that it is very threatening," says Esther Perel, a couples therapist in New York city and author of *Mating in Captivity*.

Loss of libido also makes men more unhappy about the rest of their lives than it does women. Only 23% of men with loss of libido say they still feel very happy about life in general vs. 46% of women, says Edward Laumann, professor of sociology at the University of Chicago co-author of *The Social Organization of Sexuality: Sexual Practices in the United States*. "It bothers men more."

But loss of libido is not something you have to live with. There is much you can do to regain your sex drive and your happy outlook on life.

Libido loss doesn't usually happen suddenly – it's not like catching a cold where you wake up one morning and whoops, there it is. It can be a gradual process. Though difficult to define precisely, Laumann measures it as follows: "It is a lack of interest in sex for several months of the past year."

Frequency of sexual activity is not the best measure of sexual interest – so many circumstances can get in the way of an encounter, even if the desire is there. But if you are in a committed relationship and having sex less often than the norm -- about once a week – you might ask yourself whether you are happy with things as they are.

If you're not happy about your loss of libido, researchers agree that it is best to grapple with these issues before they become entrenched. To help identify the early warning signs, see whether you answer the following questions true or false:

1. Touching takes place only in the bedroom.
2. Sex does not give you feelings of connection and sharing.
3. One of you is always the initiator and the other feels pressured.
4. You no longer look forward to sex.
5. Sex is mechanical and routine.
6. You almost never have sexual thoughts or fantasies about your spouse.
7. You have sex once or twice a month at most.

"If you answered true to many or most of these questions, you may be on your way to losing sexual desire," writes McCarthy. Understanding the various causes is the first step to finding the appropriate resolution.

### What Accounts for Loss of Libido in Men?

The causes of this complex problem range from the physical and medical to the psychological and social. Quick fixes don't solve everything.

- Erectile Dysfunction Causes Loss of Libido

Impotence, or ED, erectile dysfunction, is not the same as loss of libido, but when you experience one, sooner or later you are likely to feel the other as well. "Only 7% of young men report being unable to keep an erection," Laumann says. Though ED does increase with age: "It's 12% by age 40, 18% for ages 50-59; and then a sharp rise by age 60 to 25% to 30%," says Laumann.

The good news: depending on the cause, "drugs can help that," Laumann says. Vasodilators, such as Viagra, Cialis, and Levitra, enhance blood flow to the penis. It also helps to understand that it's normal for erections to come and go during lovemaking -- "It can happen two to five times in a 45-minute sexual session," McCarthy says.

- Performance Anxiety and Loss of Libido

Men report two major problems -- anxiety about performance and climaxing too early, according to Laumann. Almost one in three men report premature ejaculation, while under one in five are worried about performance, according to Laumann.

And the anxiety doesn't stop there. Many modern, loving, and conscientious husbands feel they have not truly "performed" unless their partners climax during sex, too. And as Laumann's statistics show, only 26% of women report that they always experience orgasm during sex, compared with 75% of men. No wonder men feel the pressure -- and performing under pressure can cause loss of libido.

- Stress Leads to Loss of Libido

Job stress and self-esteem are also big factors. "If a man's performance at work is challenged, and he doesn't feel he is achieving or doesn't feel self-worth, he often numbs himself sexually," says Perel, "Desire is a healthy form of entitlement -- when you don't feel deserving, you shut down."

- Medical Conditions Can Cause Loss of Libido

A variety of medical problems and chronic physical conditions can diminish a man's sex drive. Serious illnesses, such as cancer and depression, can certainly dampen any thoughts of sex. Cardiovascular disease, hypertension, and diabetes can reduce blood flow to the body, including the genitals, wreaking havoc on libido as well. Chronic alcoholism and even occasional excessive alcohol consumption are notorious for inflaming desire but impeding performance. Conditions such as thyroid disorders and tumors of the pituitary gland (which controls most hormone production, including sex hormones) can also lower libido.

- Medications Can Interfere With Libido

The class of depression drugs called SSRIs can inhibit desire. So can tranquilizers and blood pressure medications. Illicit substances, such as heroin, cocaine, and marijuana, when used heavily and chronically, may also cause loss of libido. On the positive side, when you talk to your doctor about these issues, there are alternative drugs for depression and other conditions that may have less of an impact on sexual desire.

- The Quality of the Relationship Is an Important Part of Libido

It is not only women who respond -- with sexiness or inhibited sexuality -- to how happy they are in their relationship. Problems with sex can -- but do not always -- signal other problems in the relationship that need to be addressed. Anger and disappointment often carry over into the bedroom.

- Too Much Togetherness Can Sap Libido

The paradox of modern relationships is that greater intimacy may not make for better sex. “Sometimes too much closeness stifles desire; fire needs air,” says Perel. “Separateness is a precondition for connection. When intimacy collapses into fusion, it is not lack of closeness but too much closeness that impedes desire.”

- The Wrong Kind of Respect Can Cause Loss of Libido

For some men, the very love and respect they have for their partners – especially after the birth of a baby – can become an obstacle to sexual desire. “A lot of men find it difficult to eroticize the mother of their children. It feels too regressive, too incestuous,” says Perel. And of course, if they are pulling their weight in the care of a baby or young children, the resulting exhaustion can sap libido for men as surely as it does for women.

Even where children are not involved, Perel reports that some men say things like, “I can’t do that with my wife.” Her advice? In the first instance, get some sleep. In the second, you never know until you try.

### 8 Tips for Rekindling Libido

The advice here is not so much about getting more, but getting better. Frequency is not the only measure of libido. Feelings count, too. If you look forward to sex, and feel good about it before, during, and after, that is the true measure of whether your libido is healthy. Here’s how to help combat loss of libido.

#### 1. Get physical and Boost Libido

“When you have no desire you feel frozen. Juice is not flowing – so movement is important, figuratively as well as literally,” say Perel. “It gets people unstuck.” Take up a sport, go walking, with or without your partner. If you already walk or run or work out, try challenging yourself just a little bit further, so you feel a sense of accomplishment and vitality. That physical confidence will carry over into sexual confidence.

#### 2. Keep Expectations Real

It may take the pressure off performance anxiety to bear in mind that not every sexual encounter has to be perfect. Probably only about 40% to 50% of sexual events can be mutually satisfying, McCarthy writes in his book. If you laugh off moments when things don’t work right, your partner will be more likely to want to experiment the next time around, since it takes some pressure and guilt off of her, too.

#### 3. Use Imagination to Fight Loss of Libido

Yes, exploring your fantasies is now regarded by marriage therapists as a good thing. If you want your partner to share in the joy, you may want to both explore further some of the newer erotic literature and films that include female fantasies as well as male. After you’ve shared yours, ask your partner about her fantasies. If she says she doesn’t have any, don’t stop there. Instead, ask her to name just one thing she has ever wished a man would do to give her pleasure. (That’s a fantasy, but she may not call it that.)

#### 4. Build Anticipation to Combat Loss of Libido

Sure, the idea of sex being utterly spontaneous -- no planning, just the heat of the moment -- sounds great. But for anyone with jobs, family, and real lives, there just may not be enough hours in the day to wait for the inclination to arise. Instead, turn planning into an opportunity to build anticipation, the way you look forward to going to a basketball game. Take pleasure in the details – get your partner a little gift, put on your favorite music from college days, turn off the phones and hire a babysitter to take the kids out to a long movie so there will be no interruptions.

#### 5. Focus on the Whole Body to Boost Libido.

For men, sexuality tends to be focused disproportionately on the genitals. Focusing on the other erogenous zones can ease performance pressure – and add new pleasure. Where sexual satisfaction is concerned, the

shortest distance between two points – from arousal to orgasm -- is not necessarily a straight line to the genitals. Take detours along the whole body, for yourself and your partner. Be pleasure oriented, not goal oriented. Tease and touch and take your time.

#### 6. Talk About What You Want to Increase Libido

Talking is hard in the best of times, but even harder if you have been avoiding sex together and tension is high. So if you can't talk, get one of the dozens of excellent sex books out there and point to a chapter. Cozy up and read it together. Look at the pictures, laugh – and let your partner know you're open to making things better between you.

#### 7. Go Out With Friends Together

Desire feeds on newness. When you go out to a dinner party with other people, you get the chance to see your partner in a fresh light. You remember how interesting and exciting she is – and she gets to see you shine as well. You remember why you were attracted to each other in the first place.

#### 8. Specialists Can Help Combat Loss of Libido

When you have an electrical problem, you call an electrician, right? Sex and marital specialists can be just as helpful when it comes to loss of libido, so get over your resistance to asking for directions, and call one.

Check with your doctor or urologist to rule out any medical conditions that may be playing a part. If you are taking medication, such as an antidepressant, that may be causing loss of libido, discuss alternatives with your doctor.