

In the mood

FOR LOVE!

Is low libido getting you down? **Ché Kelly** investigates the solutions

If the 2007 Durex Sexual Wellbeing Global Survey is to be believed, South Africans are having sex on average twice a week. But what if you're more of a once-a-month kind of person – does that mean your sex life is abnormal?

Not necessarily, says clinical sexologist Dr Marlene Wasserman (also known as Dr Eve). 'There is no such thing as a "normal" sex life. The objective is for people to have "satisfying" sex lives.' By 'satisfying' Dr Wasserman means a sex life that both partners are happy with, one that is right for your stage of life and relationship. 'People's sexual exchanges will change as they move through life together, and their libidos will be affected by the many events of life that are thrown at them,' says Dr Wasserman.

Libido, she explains, is the drive to be sexual with oneself and with a partner. If you are ill, under a great deal of stress, have just given birth, or are experiencing hormonal changes (particularly while going through menopause), pain during sex or conflict in your relationship, then your appetite for sex may be influenced. Certain medications such as antidepressants can also play a role.

EBB AND FLOW

While men do occasionally suffer from low libido, Cape Town-based sexologist Dr Esther Sapire says that due to their higher testosterone levels, men usually want sex three times as often as women. When a man does experience low libido, it is usually due to thyroid or pituitary disorders, or low testosterone levels, all of which can be checked by blood



tests and treated. A man's libido can also be affected by depression, chronic illness, stress, fatigue, conflict in the relationship or lack of attraction to his partner. However, the most common problems that men present, says Dr Sapire, are premature ejaculation and erectile dysfunction (ED). 'ED is not

'neutral' because of the multiple daily tasks she has to deal with, which can make her tired, stressed and preoccupied. When this happens her libido may decrease and she may seldom feel 'spontaneous desire'. 'It's important to note that one-in-three women never feel this spontaneous sexual desire,'

It is important to note that one in three women never feel this spontaneous sexual desire. However most of these women can still respond to effective stimulation.

always associated with loss of libido because the man may still have the desire to have sex but be unable to gain or maintain his erection,' she explains. In terms of women's libido Dr Sapire agrees with Dr Wasserman, explaining that at certain times in a woman's life her sexuality may actually become

says Dr Sapire, 'However, most of these women can still respond to effective stimulation, which means they have not lost their interest in sex.'

In these cases a couple can receive counselling together and work towards changing their attitudes – for example, a woman needs to learn how to be more >>

IMAGE: GALLO IMAGES; STILL: MIKE CARELSE

open to stimulation and how to express to her partner what she needs from him; while a man needs to learn how to effectively pleasure his lover so that she can feel stimulated and access her desire again.

It's also interesting to note that for the first two-to-three years of a relationship, says Dr Sapire, studies have shown that there are neurochemical changes in the brain that increase sexual desire, but these levels are not sustainable and they diminish over time.

THE BIG O

'Women should realise that libido is not necessarily related to orgasm,' says Dr Sapire. You can have an orgasm and still feel dissatisfied. And you can have a high libido but be unable to orgasm.

'It is difficult for many women to become orgasmic as it requires giving themselves time to reach high levels of arousal, knowing what kind of stimulation they need to get there and, if with a partner, being able to voice these needs to him,' explains Dr Wasserman. She advises women to self-pleasure so that they can become more confident in their ability to orgasm, which will often automatically help to increase desire.

LIBIDO IN A PILL?

Both Dr Wasserman and Dr Sapire agree that there are no pills to increase your libido magically. 'The pills, creams, gels and patches that promise women this are taking advantage of women's desperate need for help,' warns Dr Wasserman. Contrary to popular belief, the contraceptive pill is not usually a

major influence on libido. If you do feel that your particular pill is decreasing your libido, you can switch to another pill or change your method of contraception.

If your low libido is interfering with your quality of life, visit your doctor to rule out medical reasons. Next, you may need to start investigating emotional or psychological issues. You could choose conventional therapy, or you may prefer to visit someone like Fiona Leibowitz, a sexuality counsellor who incorporates Taoist and Tantric techniques.

Leibowitz works with couples and singles. Participants engage with breath and sound combined with self-reflective homework tasks such as journaling and dream observation. Self-pleasuring techniques are also encouraged for people to understand their bodies better – in turn they can communicate their needs to their partners.

'I am very sensitive of creating a space that is safe and non-threatening for people to explore these profound aspects of self,' assures Leibowitz, 'There is no nudity or sexually explicit conduct involved, and in group programmes there is no self-revelation, though participants do often combine this work with private consultations where their specific issue is addressed.'

USEFUL CONTACTS

- * Visit Dr Marlene Wasserman's website: www.dreve.co.za.
- * Visit The Southern African Sexual Health Association: www.sexualhealth.co.za.
- * Visit Fiona Leibowitz's website: www.fionaleibowitz.com. ■



Durex Play lubricants in Feel and Heat R39,99 EACH



Erex for Men, to support sex drive (four capsules) R69,95



Chinagra (30s) to increase sexual arousal* R94,99



PHARMACY FACT

Like low libido, erectile dysfunction (ED) can be caused by physical factors (for example, hypertension or diabetes) or psychological factors (performance anxiety, conflict in the relationship), says Dr Sapire. 'It's important to know that ED can be a marker for cardiovascular disease so it should never be ignored purely out of embarrassment.' She advises women to treat partners who are suffering from ED in a reassuring manner: 'Do not get angry and don't take it as rejection. It can actually be frightening to him if you react like this.'

Dr Sapire recommends a medical check-up to rule out illness as well as psychological causes. Once these have been ruled out, you can look at treatment options including injections, pills or vacuum devices.

FIND THAT PRODUCT! Products marked with * are available at selected Clicks stores. Call the Clicks Customer Service Centre on 0860-254-257 for the details of your nearest stockist. Not all products featured may be available at Clicks Pharmacies. Prices are correct at time of going to print, but may vary according to promotional activity.