



Rekindling the Romantic Fire

Natural Solutions to Intimate Problems

While sexual intimacy isn't the only ingredient, it is an important for developing the bond of love in a healthy long-term relationship. So, when lack of desire, inability to perform, or other reproductive health issues make it difficult for a man or a woman to enjoy intimacy, it can create friction.

In this issue of *Sunshine Sharing*, we'll explore how to overcome some of these barriers to intimacy. We'll start with lack of desire and then move to solving physical problems that interfere with intimacy, including erectile dysfunction, infections, and other conditions that make sexual activity difficult or painful.

Enhancing the Desire for Intimacy

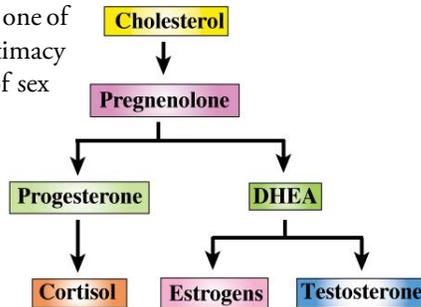
Sometimes, a partner just isn't in the mood for sexual intimacy. In fact, it's a pretty common issue in relationships. In an article in *Psychology Today*, "Normal Healthy Couples Have Sexual Desire Problems," David Schnarch, PhD, indicated that 35% of the couples he surveyed almost always have problems with one partner lacking desire, while another 25% reported they usually have desire problems. In contrast, only 9% of couples reported rarely having desire problems and only 6% of couples never had problems with desire.

In surveying 20,000 couples, Dr. Schnarch also discovered that 34% of couples have sex once or twice a month, while only 26% have sex once or twice a week. Only 7% have sex four or more times a week. So, the vast majority of couples (67%) are intimate from once or twice a week to once or twice a month. So, don't think that your relationship is abnormal if you've settled into that pattern, it's pretty normal.

Stress and Intimacy

If lack of desire is creating friction in a relationship, one of the things couples can do to increase the desire for intimacy is to reduce stress. Stress adversely affects the levels of sex hormones, which lowers the sex drive.

The mechanism works like this. Pregnenolone is made from cholesterol and that can either be used to manufacture progesterone or DHEA, the master sex hormone. Progesterone, is used to make the stress hormone cortisol and DHEA is used to make the sex hormones estrogen and testosterone.

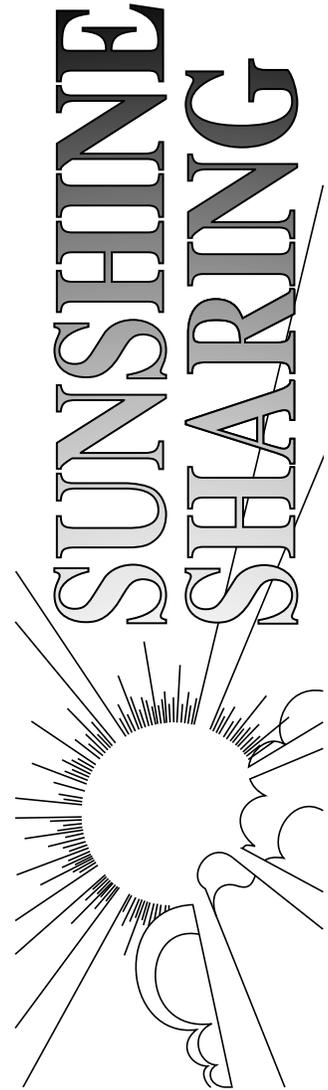


Chronic stress causes more pregnenolone to be shunted into the production of cortisol, resulting in lower levels of DHEA. This results in lower levels of sex hormones and reduced libido (and fertility) in both men and women. Chronic stress also creates fatigue and when the body's energies are low, using energy for sex is a relatively low priority.

Adaptogens

This is why adaptogens may help to improve sex drive in both men and women. Some adaptogens are believed to help reduce the output of the stress hormone cortisol and increase production of DHEA. This increases both energy and sex hormone production, which can create more desire and energy for intimate activities.

Adaptogens that show promise in increasing sexual desire and response include ashwagandha, Asian and American ginseng, he shu wu, holy basil, lycium, rhodiola, schisandra, and



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shatavari. One of the formulas that is helpful for this is the *Chinese Fire Increasing Formula*, which contains schisandra, lycium, Asian ginseng, biota seed, and other herbs that rebuild the body from chronic stress. It is helpful for people who are chronically nervous, suffering from poor sleep, mental confusion, fatigue, and loss of sex drive.

Aphrodisiacs

In addition to adaptogens, there are herbs that have been used historically to increase sex drive. Known as aphrodisiacs, these remedies are believed to help restore the desire for intimacy. Aphrodisiac herbs include Asian ginseng, damiana, horny goat weed, chocolate, vanilla, and maca.

Aphrodisiacs generally have properties that help invigorate the nervous system while reducing feelings of stress. Damiana, for instance, is a tonic for stress, low energy, and depression. In other words, it works best when low sex drive is due to fatigue and stress that create feelings of depression.

In a similar manner, maca acts as an adaptogen and rejuvenating tonic that can aid erectile dysfunction in men and low desire in women. It also aids infertility. It's interesting that both chocolate and vanilla have traditionally been seen to have aphrodisiac qualities, as treats made with them are used to convey feelings of love, affection, and romantic desire.

Any of these aphrodisiac herbs can be used on their own but they can also be combined into *Aphrodisiac Formulas*, which often these herbs, adaptogens, and circulatory enhancing herbs. There are also essential oils that have aphrodisiac effects which can be used to help. (See *Setting the Mood*)

DHEA

We mentioned the reduction in DHEA caused by chronic stress. DHEA levels also fall with age. When you're young, DHEA levels are naturally higher and which increases your sex drive. As these levels fall, your sex drive slows down as well. So, taking DHEA can help boost the production of reproductive hormones and increase sexual function and desire.

For this purpose DHEA works well with the previously mentioned adaptogens and aphrodisiacs. However, be careful when taking DHEA as you don't want to boost sex hormones to the point you re-experience teenage hormonal problems like acne.

Low Thyroid

One more hormonal factor that may be a problem in loss of desire, particularly in women, is low thyroid. Low thyroid reduces energy and the metabolism of cholesterol necessary for producing pregnenolone and DHEA. If reduced desire is coupled with weight gain, dry and lack-luster skin, thinning hair, fatigue and depression, then supporting the thyroid with a *Hypothyroid Formula* or *Thyroid Glandular Formula* may be helpful. These formulas typically contain herbs like kelp, dulse, Irish moss, and black walnut.



Setting the Mood

Since stress inhibits sexual drive and intimate feelings, it makes sense that doing things to reduce stress and promote a relaxed body and positive state of mind will enhance the desire for intimacy. One way to do this is to use essential oils that have aphrodisiac effects in a massage oil or lotion and give your partner a relaxing massage.

Some of the oils believed to have aphrodisiac qualities include sandalwood, rose, ylang ylang, jasmine, and patchouli. The floral scents of rose, jasmine or ylang ylang are not only relaxing, they also evoke tender romantic feelings. If one or both of you are emotionally stressed out, try the deep, woody aroma of sandalwood to calm the mind and enhance the mood. Patchouli has also been considered an aphrodisiac, promoting feelings of happiness and gratitude. Don't overdo it, though, as a little bit goes a long way.

When you do a massage with aphrodisiac oils focus on making the massage relaxing and loving, not sexual. For example, start with a foot or scalp massage. You can also rub your partner's back, shoulders, and neck to ease pain and stress. This is particularly true for many women, who typically need more affection to open up to physical intimacy. If you focus on enjoying the pleasures of lovingly touching your partner, your touch will usually be pleasurable to them.

By the way, you can also diffuse these oils in the room or use them in candles to set the mood for intimacy. Dim lights and flickering candles invoke a relaxed sensual feeling. Putting on some relaxing music is also helpful.



Oxytocin and Feelings of Intimacy

The feelings that help us bond as human beings are associated with a hormone produced by the hypothalamus called oxytocin. Oxytocin appears to produce the opposite effects that stress produces. Stress activates the "hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis" (also called the HPA axis) which causes us to want to fight, or flee, or simply shut down emotionally, i.e., freeze. The hormones associated with this are cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine.

Oxytocin is a hormone associated with feeling safe, warm, connected, and loved. It works along with endorphins and serotonin to help produce good, relaxed, safe feelings, rather than feelings of stress. Research suggests that increased oxytocin can potentially increase feelings of generosity, forgiveness, trustworthiness, joy, and security. It also helps increase fidelity (monogamy) in relationships, and make us protective of those we love.

Oxytocin also has physical benefits. Stress increases blood pressure, oxytocin reduces it. Stress increases inflammation and inhibits healing, while oxytocin helps reduce inflammation and promote healing from trauma and illness.

Both women and men produce oxytocin, but women produce more oxytocin during labor, breast-feeding, and mother-infant

bonding. In men it increases testosterone production, fertility, and a protective feeling for others.

Enhancing Oxytocin

So, how do we increase oxytocin in relationships? First of all, it's released in response to positive physical contact, including hugs, shaking hands, massage and other forms of loving touch, including breast-feeding (which increases the bond between mother and child). In an interesting twist, foreplay increases oxytocin, but orgasm reduces it, causing a release of hormones, especially in men, that result in a feeling of satiation and disconnection. So, if you want to feel more bonded, create more time for non-sexual, affectionate physical contact.

Other things which contribute to oxytocin release are making eye contact, laughing together (humor has always been considered a great aphrodisiac), sharing meals (think of taking your partner on a dinner date), and sharing other positive social interactions (such as participating in recreational activities together that you both enjoy, again, think of dating).

One reason why couples drift apart is that they stop courting each other. Romantic love requires constant courtship. Think of it this way—romantic love is not a weed that grows without effort, it's a delicate, green house flower that requires attention and care.

Anise and fennel, which have been traditionally used to aid lactation (breast milk production) have an oxytocic effect, as does clary sage essential oil. Chocolate has both a mild oxytocic effect and an endorphin-like effect, which is part of the reason why giving chocolates is associated with expressing feelings of love.

Relationship Issues

Lack of desire is also caused by stress created by conflicts in the relationship. In his book, *Passionate Marriage*, David Schnarch asserts what's happening in the bedroom communicates very clearly what's happening in the marriage. Intimacy requires trust and intimacy and so when you are intimate you are communicating your love and trust. When there are relationship problems they will adversely affect your intimate life.

An essential element in a healthy marriage is that couples communicate with each other about their emotional needs and build feelings of love by regularly doing things to show love and support for their partner. Two good resources for helping couples improve their relationship are the book *His Needs, Her Needs* by William F. Harley, Jr. (marriagebuilders.com) and *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman (5lovelanguages.com). The information in these books can help couples learn how to create greater

Additional Help and Information

For more information about how to solve problems interfering with intimacy in a relationship, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

Women's Encyclopedia of Natural Medicine by Tori Hudson

The Male Herbal by James Green

Cupid's Poisoned Arrow by Marnia Robinson

Aphrodisiac: The Herbal Path to Healthy Sexual Fulfillment and Vital Living by Kimberly Gallagher and Hay House, Inc.

feelings of love and intimacy in a relationship by learning how to fulfill their partners desires for love.

Physical Barriers to Intimacy

Even if a couple has a great relationship, there are physical health issues that can interfere with intimacy. Here are some of them and suggestions on how to overcome them.



Male Dysfunction

Erectile dysfunction (ED) is the inability to get and keep an erection firm enough for sex. Formerly known as impotency, this problem affects about 5-15 percent of men in the United States. The risk of ED increases with age, and can have both physical and psychological causes. It may also be a side effect of some drugs. Here are some potential causes and solutions.

Low Testosterone

Adequate testosterone levels are essential to achieving an erection. Low testosterone has become quite common in Western society, possibly due to the influence of endocrine disrupters in the environment that either mimic estrogen or depress testosterone. So, for starters, men should avoid xenoestrogens, chemicals that mimic estrogen, causing not only ED, but other male health problems such as man boobs, low sperm count, and weight gain.

If low testosterone levels are a cause of ED, herbs like Korean ginseng, maca, tribulus and muira puama may be helpful. It can also be helpful to take DHEA. In some cases, a testosterone cream, available by prescription, may also be needed. However, it's also important to avoid substances that depress testosterone including endocrine disrupters and fluoride.

Endocrine Disrupters

Many pesticides act as xenoestrogens and estrogen is often fed to animals to increase production of eggs, milk, and meat. Using organically grown foods will reduce exposure to these endocrine disrupters. Another source is chemicals in plastics, especially soft plastics. These chemicals leach from plastic when it gets hot, so use glass, ceramic, or metal containers where possible.

There are also plants which contain phytoestrogens that can also disrupt male hormones. While these are probably not a problem if you have healthy testosterone levels and use them in moderation, they are a problem if your testosterone is low and you use them frequently. These include all soy products, high lignin flax seed oil, hops (which is used to make beer), and the essential oils of pink grapefruit and clary sage.

Fluoride and Testosterone

Another endocrine disrupter is fluoride, which can be added to water supplies and is used in toothpaste and dental treatments. It can also enter the body from nonstick cookware and some drugs (including many antidepressants). There is evidence to suggest that fluoride depresses testosterone production, so avoid fluoride as much as possible.

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To get fluoride out of your system avoid fluoridated water, don't use fluoride toothpaste and dental treatments, get rid of Teflon cookware, and check your medications. Increase your intake of iodine, which can be done by taking herbs like kelp or dulse, since iodine displaces fluoride (and vice-versa). It also helps to increase intake of boron.

Poor Circulation

Poor circulation is a common cause of ED because good blood flow is essential to achieving an erection. High blood pressure, atherosclerosis, and other problems with blood flow will make it difficult to get and sustain an erection, even where testosterone levels are adequate.

The popular performance drugs like Viagra® and Cialis® work by enhancing circulation. There are natural alternatives that perform a similar function. These include l-arginine, red beet root, yohimbe, and horny goat weed. If there are circulatory problems that may be contributing to ED, a *Nitric Oxide Boosting Formula* containing l-arginine, red beet root, magnesium, and other nutrients that enhance circulation will be helpful.

If both circulatory problems and low testosterone are a problem, a *Male Performance Formula* containing ingredients like l-arginine, horny goat weed, DHEA, yohimbe, damiana, maca, and muira puama could be helpful. The blend not only helps to rapidly improve blood flow to the male organs, it also helps inhibit xenoestrogens, increase testosterone levels, and enhance energy and desire.



Female Dysfunction

Poor circulation also causes sexual dysfunction in women. This is because female tissue needs good circulation in order to create arousal. So, poor circulation inhibits a woman's ability to enjoy intimacy, jtoo. Which is why circulatory-enhancing herbs like garlic, capsicum, and ginger, as well as a *Nitric Oxide Boosting Formula* can also aid sexual response in women.

Vaginal Dryness

Vaginal dryness can not only interfere with the pleasure of intimacy, it can make intercourse painful. This may become a problem after menopause when hormone levels drop. The essential oils of clary sage and pink grapefruit may help if this is the case. Remedies that have estrogenic effects like soy and black cohosh may also help.

Topically, you can use a lubricant or make your own by mixing evening primrose oil with vitamin E. Enhancing oxytocin production and having more frequent intimacy, with or without intercourse, will also help.

Infections

Yeast, bacterial, or viral infections (like herpes) can make intercourse unpleasant or downright painful. Since intercourse will transfer infections back and forth between partners, it's essential that both partners get treated for infection even if only one of them have symptoms.

For both clearing up and preventing transmission of infection, a *Nanoparticle Silver Gel* should be applied to both partners private areas before and after sexual activity. It can also help lubrication. It's also important to wash these areas thoroughly after intimacy.

If yeast infections are present causing inflammation, both partners should do a *Yeast/Fungal Cleanse*, containing remedies like pau d'arco, garlic, oregano, and caprylic acid. They should also take probiotics. Probiotics can also be dissolved in water and used as a douche to restore friendly flora to the vaginal walls and aid the healing process.

In the case of viral infections, like herpes, the *Chinese Wind-Heat Evil Formula*, containing indigo (assam) leaf & root, dandelion, purslane, thlaspi, bupleurum root, and baical skullcap, has been helpful for clearing these infections. It should be taken regularly by both partners for at least six months and preferably one year to clear the virus from the system. Black walnut and lemon balm (melissa) can also be helpful for combating herpes infections.