

## **Not Tonight Honey!**

As women age, they are two to three times more likely than men to have decreased sexual desire. In fact, changes in desire, frequency and responsiveness occur in about half of middle aged women. This can be frustrating for both partners and puts additional strain on relationships that are often already overly stressed during this phase of life.

The cause of sexual dysfunction is multifaceted. Middle aged women manage careers, households, teenage children and aging parents. All of these stressors play a profound role on many aspects of our health, and sexual health is not immune to its adverse effects. At the end of a long day, many women will find themselves too weary to engage in sex. Other factors contributing to decreased sexual desire include depression and anxiety and the drugs used to treat them. Chronic diseases such as high blood pressure and diabetes in either partner, again along with their drug treatments, can also decrease sexual desire. In addition, up to 75% of post menopausal women can suffer from vaginal dryness and pain with intercourse due to decreased estrogen levels.

Most people feel that a healthy sex life is important for overall well-being. However such difficulties may not be the easiest issue to bring up with your physician. Women often need help or encouragement to recognize and seek treatment, but discussing sexual concerns with a health care provider can however be helpful. Be sure that you have had a physical examination to rule out other health issues. Review your medications to determine if they might be a contributing factor.

As a women's brain is still her biggest sexual organ, try thinking about sex. Keeping open lines of communication with your partner to ensure that your concerns are understood is essential. Scheduling time for dates and sexual encounters may be helpful as women try to juggle busy agendas. Try changing your sexual routine, such as the location or time of day. Start with a sensual massage or warm bath. In the bedroom, allow more time for foreplay especially if vaginal dryness is an issue. Experiment with vaginal lubricants (water-based) and the array of erotic materials and products available.

Focus on your body inside and out. A healthy mind and body will lead to a healthier sex life. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle with regular exercise, sufficient sleep and a balanced diet will help to boost your self-confidence. If you can learn to love your body, it will be easier for you to allow your partner to love you.

In some cases, medical intervention may be necessary. If you are postmenopausal, your doctor may recommend an estrogen product that may help restore vaginal lubrication and reduce pain on intercourse. Vaginal estrogen supplementation does not have any effect on libido however and the use of oral estrogen actually may decrease testosterone levels. If you are using oral hormone replacement therapy, you may want to ask your physician about switching to topical products, as they have less of an effect on testosterone levels. Although testosterone has always been thought of as the "male sex hormone", it is just as important to women as it is to men, especially as it relates to sexual desire. Topical or oral testosterone therapy may be helpful for some women.

Sexual activity doesn't have to end at middle age. Continue to enjoy sex for as long as you wish. Sexual activity and stimulation actually improve elasticity and lubrication of the vaginal tissues, allowing for a more pleasurable, longer sex life.