

## **What happened to my libido?**

**By Karen K. Harrison**  
**Printed in Evolving Magazine**

“What happened to my libido?” is one of the most common questions I get as a sex therapist. Both men and women ask the question but primarily more women. People call concerned for their marriage or relationship as one partner is interested in sex and the other either has a different desire level or feels no desire. Women are concerned that if they don’t have sex, their husbands will turn to porn or an affair. Men are worried their wives will see them as less than a man for not having desire. Both men and women worry about whether their partner will stay with them if they don’t have sex more often. My job as a sex therapist is to help them to find out why they have a low desire and help them resolve the issue.

Women’s sexuality is generally more complicated than men’s sexuality. One of my clients described it as though the moon and stars have to line up in order for her to feel desire. Many factors impact women. Men’s sexuality can be complicated too, but more often, men are driven by hormones and less by mental and emotional factors.

I commonly start with a sex history for both men and women. What was she told about sexuality as a child? Generally girls get messages of good girls don’t have sex, wait until marriage, don’t get pregnant, you will be disgraced if you get pregnant, and all men want is sex. Men are told not to get a girl pregnant but considered a “stud” for having sex. Neither boys or girls are given much information about sex, birth control, or loving sexual relationships. Teens often get their information about sex from friends who don’t know much, from television and movies, or from watching porn. Parents are generally uncomfortable discussing sexuality with their children. And parents often don’t share much affection with each other in front of the children. If they don’t display hugs, kisses, and holding hands, their kids won’t know what healthy touch is for their own relationships. Healthy touch forms the basis for healthy sexuality. If our kids don’t see us enjoying our partner affectionately, they will get the idea that we have a sex less marriage. Why should they wait for sex until marriage when we display a sex less marriage? Additionally, religion can have a negative impact on sexuality. When brought up with shame and guilt messages about sex, it is hard to turn them off once married, especially for women.

Was the person sexually abused as a child or teen? Many times the abusers are mother’s boyfriend, an uncle, a grandfather, a neighbor, or someone the child knows and trusts. Being sexually abused for men or women has a lasting impact that can flood the abused with shame and guilt and kill sexual desire for the rest of their life unless it is worked through – most commonly in counseling.

Next we check out dating relationships up to and including the current relationship and look for any problem issues such as date rape, having sex before feeling ready, pain issues, erection problems, sexually transmitted diseases, and affairs.

In the current relationship, we check out the relationship satisfaction overall. Is the couple going out on regular dates? If they are not having fun as romantic partners, it is hard to have a quality sexual relationship. How is communication and conflict resolution going? Are the chores handled fairly? Do the kids have a bedtime that is at least 1 hour before the parent's bedtime so that the parents have some time alone? Do the parents have a lock on the door for privacy? Do the kids and pets sleep with the parents? Have there been any affairs that have eroded trust and love? Do the couple talk openly about their sexual relationship sharing what they like and dislike in a loving way? What kind of a desire discrepancy is there? For more information about these topics, see my article on [Rekindling Your Romantic Relationship](http://www.karenharrison.net) on my website at [www.karenharrison.net](http://www.karenharrison.net). A few couples that have come to me for help with their couple sexuality don't seem to like or respect each other. The man thinks that if they just had sex more often, everything would be fine. The woman has decided that she is not interested in having sex if she doesn't feel safe, loved, and supported in the relationship.

Health issues have an impact on sexuality. Are there pain issues such as back pain, sciatica pain, bladder issues, or genital pain during intercourse? How much liquor is the man drinking prior to sex? Even a couple of beers can impact erections. For men and women, hormone levels have an impact on sexuality. This can be checked out at your doctor through blood or saliva tests. Women can look at the website [www.womeninbalance.org](http://www.womeninbalance.org) for more information about hormones. Women who have had a hysterectomy can lose desire as well as have problems with their genitals. Using bioidentical hormones may rectify the problem. Stress has a huge impact on sexuality. When a person is stressed, he or she is in the head and not in the body where pleasure can be experienced most easily. Depression causes a person to lose interest in life as well as sex. Many anti-depressants cause a decrease in libido, however, depression does too. Caffeine use can impact sexuality by making a person jittery and anxious.

Sleep has a huge impact on sexuality. When a person doesn't have enough sleep, he or she often isn't in the mood for sex. Sleep is impacted by hormones, pets and kids in the bed, snoring, pain, alcohol, depression, anxiety, shift work, relationship problems, and more. Young parents often are wakened by their infants and toddlers. Parents of teens may stay up waiting for their kids to get home.

Issues such as performance anxiety, body image, power struggles over sex, and conflict over pornography have an impact. Men most commonly worry about their performance, which kills sexual desire and makes some men avoid sex.

Women worry most about body image and think that if they feel unattractive, their partner will find them unattractive too and not be interested in sex. Conflict over pornography is common for couples today and the couple has to come to some agreement if whether they agree on no porn or some porn and how often and what type.

Now that I have mentioned the most common factors that impact sexuality, you may wonder if it is possible to have healthy, happy sexual relationships. The answer is yes! With the knowledge of all the things I have mentioned, you may be able to address some or all of the issues on your own or with the help of your doctor. If you would like help addressing libido issues in your relationship, check out [www.aasect.org](http://www.aasect.org) for a certified sex therapist or write or call me for an appointment. I love helping couples develop healthy, loving, and satisfying sexual relationships.

Karen Harrison, Ed.S.

[www.karenharrison.net](http://www.karenharrison.net)

816-523-4440

AASECT Certified Sex Therapist

Ipsalu Tantra Kriya Yoga Teacher

Licensed Clinical Marriage and Family Therapist

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor