

## Women's Sexual Health

A woman's sexual desire (libido) naturally fluctuates over the years. Highs and lows in libido can coincide with the beginning or ending of a relationship, and with major life changes such as pregnancy, menopause or illness. If your patients complain of a decrease in their libido, there are many solutions you can offer.

When we look at the physical causes of low libido, it's apparent that most fall under the umbrella of hormonal imbalance. Low libido is commonly accompanied by other symptoms of hormonal imbalance -- insomnia, fatigue, night sweats, vaginal dryness, fuzzy thinking. These symptoms can make daily life miserable and can also affect how patients perceive themselves. Some women say their symptoms make them feel "old and used up," as if they're losing their womanhood. In other words: not very sexy.

Estrogen helps to maintain the health of the vaginal tissues as well as a woman's interest in sex. But estrogen levels may drop during the transition to menopause, which can cause a double whammy -- decreased interest in sex and dryer vaginal tissues, resulting in painful or uncomfortable sex. At the same time, women may also experience a decrease in the hormone testosterone, which boosts sex drive in men and women alike. An effective solution to vaginal dryness is the form of estrogen called estriol. This form of estrogen does not increase estrogen dominance nor cause other unwanted symptoms. Estriol is the ideal solution to vaginal dryness. It is designed to help restore the integrity of this delicate tissue and can be supplemented once or twice daily.

In addition, many women experience a low libido before menopause, and it doesn't seem to have anything to do with estrogen or testosterone levels. Women experiencing estrogen dominance due to low progesterone levels often complain of water retention, fibrocystic breasts, depression, and irregular, occasional heavy periods, as well as a low libido. Progesterone supplementation goes a long way in addressing these symptoms and restoring a woman's sex drive.

We all know that chronic stress isn't good for us, but we may not realize its significant toll in depleting libido. The body interprets ongoing stress as life threatening, so naturally, survival is prioritized ahead of reproduction or pleasure. Many women are worn out by balancing job, marriage, and caring for aging parents and young children. In essence, an exhausted woman does not have the energy for intimacy. Thus, it is also essential to test for adrenal fatigue. (Encouraging her partner to help with the dishes, the laundry, the grocery shopping and clearing up after kids, is also an idea).

Testing for and treating hormone imbalance is important, but remember some of the other common reasons for low libido: medications (such as antidepressants or blood pressure meds), drug and alcohol abuse, or being overweight. Also, a sedentary lifestyle can contribute to a lackluster sex drive. Exercise will build energy and stamina, both elements of libido.