

Health

You told us:

87%

wish you were
having more sex.

25%

have sex about
as often as the
seasons change.

21%

have sex a few
times a month.

20%

have sex a few
times a week.

20%

have sex once
a week.

14%

have sex once
a month.

23%

would choose
a great night's
sleep over sex.



10 surprising reasons why you're **not** having sex

Everything from stress to perimenopause to text messaging (!) could be sabotaging your love life. We identify the mood busters at every age—and help you feel sexy again.

BY LESLIE GOLDMAN



Health.com

Want more loving in your life? From sexpert advice to a dozen ways to get better orgasms, we can help you get your groove back at Health.com/sex.

Not getting any? You're not alone: Women today have less time for sex than their 1950s counterparts. And it's estimated that 40 million Americans have what experts call a sexless marriage (having sex less than 10 times a year).

A regular sex life is good for your health. It can satisfy all sorts of emotional- and physical-intimacy needs and help partners stay close, says Anita H. Clayton, MD, a professor of psychiatry at the University of Virginia and author of *Satisfaction: Women, Sex, and the Quest for Intimacy*. So why the dry spell? You can chalk it up to a sheer lack of time, but there are a slew of other reasons, too—from weight gain and perimenopause to technology overload (stop texting *now*) in the bedroom. Here's how to beat the top 10 sex busters.

1 Your bed isn't sexy anymore.

We hear it over and over again: The bed should be used for sex and sleep only. So why do so many of us insist on bringing third parties—laptops, PDAs, *Law & Order*—into the boudoir? All that technology and distraction can cause insomnia and put a damper on your sex life. After all, it's harder to initiate sex if your spouse is hiding behind a newspaper or glued to the TV or if your hands are busy exploring the Web rather than his body.

>>> Sex Rx: At a minimum, make the bedroom a no-technology zone, Clayton suggests. Then take a hard look at your life (from romance and work to entertainment and family), and give sex the priority it deserves. If you have to schedule sex like you do a meeting, do it!

7%
say tech-
nology
disrupts
bedtime
pleasure.



7%
say libido-lowering drugs put the brakes on love life.

2 Your meds are stealing your sex drive.

Oh, the irony. You start taking oral contraceptives (OCs) so you can have worry-free sex. Then the magic little pills start sapping your sex drive. Why? OCs contain estrogen, which increases the production of a protein called sex-hormone binding globulin (SHBG), says Michael Krychman, MD, medical director of sexual medicine at Hoag Hospital in Newport Beach, California, and executive director of the Southern California Center for Sexual Health and Survivorship Medicine. SHBG can trap testosterone, affecting your sex drive. There's even new data suggesting that this negative impact might be long-term. Other potential sex-drive-stalling meds to be on the lookout for: those that reduce blood pressure, anxiety, and acid reflux, and antidepressants, too.

>> Sex Rx: Ask your doc about the sexual side effects of all of your drugs. You may also want to try a contraceptive method that doesn't use hormones, such as condoms, a diaphragm, or an IUD.

3 Your crazy-busy life.

You spend your days working, cooking, working out, taking care of the family. And, still, at 11:30 p.m., "you're expected to wave this magic goddess wand," Krychman says. It's enough to make even Pamela Anderson curl up in bed and cry, "headache." Besides totally tuckering you out, the chronic stresses of modern life can also trigger a cascade of hormonal changes that mess with your body's sexual-response cycle. And here's another modern sex



buster that adds to all the craziness: today's always-connected technology.

>> Sex Rx: With spontaneous sex almost out of the question, you need some serious "life management" to work it in, experts say. Put a lock on the master bedroom door and set a technology time limit. Shift gears from the harried pace of everyday life with a soothing bath, suggests *Health* contributor and Los Angeles-based sex therapist Linda De Villers, PhD. Plunging into warm water takes you away from the laptops and cell phones that clog up your day. Add a few drops of ylang-ylang essential oil; the aroma is thought to heighten sexual feelings.

41%
say hectic schedules crowd out sex.

4 You don't like your body. Many women find themselves withdrawing or not willing to experiment sexually if they're overweight or have a change in shape due to pregnancy, Clayton says. "Emotionally, we've bought into the media's idealization of what is really sexy. The message is, you have to look a certain way in order to have really good sex."

>> Sex Rx: "Women have a talent for disliking the very things about themselves that other people find very attractive," De Villers says. Feel free to ask him what he likes about your body; his compliments can help you feel more positive. But don't underestimate the mental boost of shedding some pounds. In a recent *Health.com* survey, 37 percent of respondents said losing weight makes them feel sexy. In fact, even a five-pound weight loss has been shown to jump-start sex drive.



25%
say poor body image dampens sex drive.

5 You've hit perimenopause.

Prior to menopause, hormonal shifts—specifically decreasing estrogen—lead to physiological changes that can make sex seem about as appealing as running a marathon with a pebble in your sock. Sensitive vaginal tissues become less lubricated, the ensuing dryness leads to pain, and painful sex quickly turns into no sex, Krychman says. Hot flashes don't help matters, either. A landmark study published last year in the *American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* shows women whose sexual desire drops during menopause are more apt to report night sweats, disturbed sleep, and depression.

>> Sex Rx: Talk to your physician about the pros and cons of hormone replacement therapy (HRT), which may lessen menopausal symptoms. New research shows an estrogen cream or suppository may ease dryness without the risks of HRT. Lubricants like Replens or his-and-hers lubes from K-Y can also help, especially if pain during intercourse is a problem. Pine bark extract is also getting a lot of buzz: A study in the *Scandinavian Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology* found that it may alleviate hot flashes, depression, panic attacks, elevated cholesterol, and other symptoms linked with perimenopause. Talk to your doctor before trying anything new.

6%
say peri-menopause brings hot flashes but no hot times.

6 Your man's just not that into it.

You may actually be raring to go, but your partner's engine seems stalled. Perhaps he's emotionally withdrawing, says Bob Berkowitz, PhD, co-author of *He's Just Not Up*

for It Anymore: Why Men Stop Having Sex, and What You Can Do About It. "The usual problems between husbands and wives can play out in the bedroom," he says, especially if your partner has a hard time expressing his feelings properly. Or, he may want you to be more sexually adventurous. You needn't hang from chandeliers; it could be as simple as being a more enthusiastic lover.

>>> Sex Rx: Talk it out in a blame-free way. "It's understandable that a woman would feel rejected," Berkowitz says. But don't confront him with 'What the hell is going on? Are you cheating on me?' or he'll shut down. If a man's sex life is not working out, he may feel he's failed as a man, because men invest so much of themselves in their sexuality," Berkowitz adds. So try to broach the subject in a loving way.

9%
say depression
snuffs out desire.

7 You're depressed.

When you're feeling down in the dumps, desire can take a big hit, particularly if you're female. Women tend to isolate themselves, Clayton says, and that can strain even the strongest of romantic relationships. Antidepressants may lift the dark cloud, but some affect your ability to have an orgasm.

>>> Sex Rx: If you notice your sex drive takes a nosedive after you start a new medication, tell your doctor; she may be able to prescribe an alternative, like Wellbutrin (bupropion), which doesn't affect orgasm. Consider different avenues of treatment, too. "Psychotherapy doesn't cause sexual dysfunction and is effective, especially in mild-to-moderate depression," Clayton says. Exercise also helps; it enhances mood and energy, and it boosts blood flow to the genitals.

8 Your man is Viagra-ized.

The "Viagra-ization" of men, as Krychman calls it, isn't just happening to seniors. Younger men are taking the erectile-dysfunction drug, too, sometimes just to enhance sexual performance. The result can be a physical and emotional disconnect in bed. "The man takes the medication and is ready to go, but the woman needs more time to get aroused, to get connected." The sexes tend to deal with anxiety in opposite ways, too, Clayton says. Men head to the bedroom to relieve stress, while women often need to be relaxed to even have sex.

>>> Sex Rx: Clayton suggests finding time for some nonthreatening and nonjudgmental sex talk (not in bed), during which



Stat sources: Health.com poll; Photos—Pages 136 and 137: Tom Grill/Corbis; Page 138, clockwise from top left: Masterfile, Alamy Photography/Veer, Masterfile; Page 139, clockwise from top right: Getty Images, Christian Karg/Age Fotostock

a woman can discuss what she needs in bed to even the playing field.

9 You like your vibrator better.

Reaching for your Rabbit more often than your honey bunny? This is more common than some might think, De Villers says. A vibrator is simpler and more accessible than a cooperating penis. While there's nothing wrong with incorporating sex toys into your love life, becoming reliant on a vibrator—or even preferring it over your partner—can be a serious problem. Sometimes it's a way of dealing with anger or frustration in your relationship, De Villers explains.

>>> Sex Rx: If you really are addicted to your vibrator at the expense of your relationship with your partner, talk to a therapist to gain some insight about your relationship, De Villers recommends. Perhaps learning how to communicate your needs to your partner will help. If the vibrator gives you more satisfaction than sex with your partner, talk about trying some new moves or even using the vibrator together.



5%
say vibrator preference leaves him out in the cold.

10 You're sick and tired.

About 10 to 15 percent of the women Krychman treats for low libido end up having an endocrine problem, such as undiagnosed thyroid disease, which can affect menstrual functioning and lead to exhaustion, depression, low sexual desire, and fertility



problems. Women who have chronic illnesses—such as fibromyalgia, anemia, diabetes, or rheumatoid arthritis—may not be in the mood, either, thanks to fatigue or body pain. And women

who have diabetes may also experience poor lubrication, low arousal, and a propensity for yeast infections.

>>> Sex Rx: Once a thyroid condition or anemia is detected and corrected, any associated symptoms should dissipate. If you're battling a chronic disease, you should take the focus off of the intercourse and explore other ways to achieve sexual and sensual pleasure, Clayton says. ●