

OK. MS Can Affect Your Sex Life. But There Are Things To Help Overcome Sex Problems

When we received the following letter at New Pathways, it rung a bell with many of us. To help Mrs C, we asked Sylvia Brown, Susie Cornell and Judy Graham to come up with some answers for both women and men.

Dear New Pathways,

I am married, aged 44 and have a young son. I've had MS for nearly 17 years but was only diagnosed 6 years ago. So far, the disease has been relatively kind to me and I'm still on my feet.

My main problem is that over recent years my sensory nerves are becoming more affected, ie the numbness is getting worse from the waist down. As a result, my/our sex life has taken a nosedive. I cannot feel much but what I do feel is alien to me and actually quite horrible sometimes.

I often wish MS had taken something else away from me – but not this. My husband and I, like most people, had an up and down relationship but our sex life was always good.

I'm writing to you to see if there's any help available to me. I've drawn a blank with my doctor.

Mrs C

From Sylvia Brown:

Dear Mrs C,

Many of us with MS experience such difficulties and it is hard to deal with. That said, I have found that you can still have a good and satisfying sex life; you just have to do things a bit differently.

I found it helpful to take the focus off performance and reaching orgasm, and just to relax and enjoy myself, enjoy a good massage etc. By being relaxed in

this way, you may be surprised at how much you can feel.

Using lubrication is helpful as well, KJ Jelly or Aloe Vera Gel.

Like you, I now have much less sensation 'down below' than

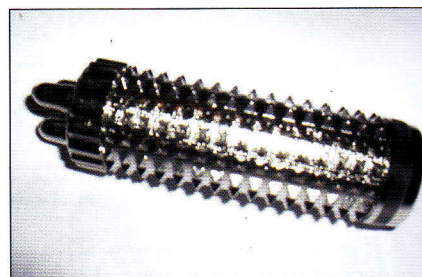
I used to and it takes much more stimulation to get me going. But I have not been afraid to experiment with vibrators.

Most vibrators are not strong enough to enable me to climax but thankfully I have found a couple of 'massagers' that do that trick.

The most effective is called the Accussager:
www.abackrubco.com.

Don't be put off by its appearance. You can cover it with something. I find it very effective. We get a result and it is good!!! For me that is the main thing, as loss of the ability to enjoy sex and orgasm is very sad.

Some women find Viagra helps in this department. I did try Viagra, and it did help, but not enough to justify the cost of buying it myself, so I stick with a



Accussager

good massage, relaxation, and my vibrating massagers!

Many people without MS also find that their sex drive goes down and their sex life deteriorates, so it is good to hear what a wonderful, caring and loving partner you have there.



Improve Your Sex Drive the Natural Way

From Susie Cornell:

Sex problems are common in MS for both men and women. MS can cause damage to the nerves within the brain and spinal cord that are responsible for sexual function. For both men and women, this can cause a decrease or loss of sex drive; decreased or unpleasant sensations in the genital area, and/or diminished ability for orgasm.

Men may also experience difficulty achieving or maintaining an erection and a decrease in, or loss of, ejaculatory force or frequency.

Women may experience decreased vaginal lubrication, loss of vaginal muscle tone, either reduced or painfully heightened sensation in the vaginal and/or clitoral area.

However, MS is not always to blame – there can be other reasons including low libido, depression, stress and relationship issues.

Sex drive is a complex issue. Desire is not only generated by the excitement and feelings you get when you fancy someone, but is also a question of physiological processes that are essential for that desire to be translated into actually wanting to have sex.

Surveys show that nearly a third of women never reach orgasm and a fifth don't enjoy sex. And although many men suffer from erectile dysfunction (not being able to have or sustain an erection), many just have a low libido.

But there are natural things you can do to boost your sex drive:

Eat The Good Sex Diet

The right foods not only help to maintain your sexual performance

and enjoyment but also to relieve many sexual problems.

If you want to optimise your sex life the key is to follow a diet that keeps your blood sugar level even and provides plenty of arginine, zinc and omega-3 fats. In practical terms this means:

- Avoid sugar and sugary snacks
- Reduce your intake of stimulants – tea, coffee, chocolate, alcohol and cigarettes
- Increase nutrient-rich foods – fruit, vegetables, wholefoods, seeds and wheat germ.
- Arginine is especially rich in fish, turkey, chicken, beans, lentils, tofu, nuts and seeds.
- Eat tuna, mackerel, herring or salmon three times a week.
- Eat oysters – they are packed full of zinc (best for men.) Every time a man has sex he loses lots of zinc. It is not a myth that oysters are the richest source – they may help your sex drive.
- Eat seeds and nuts. The best are flax, hemp, pumpkin, sunflower and sesame.
- Use cold-pressed seed oils. Choose an oil blend containing flaxseed oil or hemp oil for salad dressings and cold uses, such as drizzling on vegetables instead of butter.

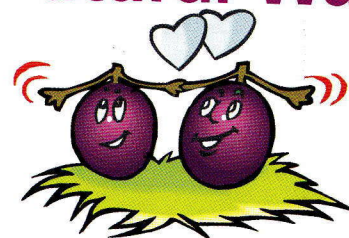
Minimise your intake of fried food, processed food and saturated fat from meat and dairy.

Dietary Supplements

To support a healthy sex life I recommend you take:

B vitamins

Needed for testosterone production, adrenal support, energy production and healthy



nerves. B1 is needed for healthy thyroid function. B3 is a vasodilator, enhancing blood flow to sex organs and essential for pituitary function which controls hormone balance. Take a vitamin B50 complex once a day.

Zinc

Research has found that men low in zinc are low in testosterone, have a low sex drive and a low sperm count. A man can lose up to 3mg of zinc per ejaculation. Smoking, alcohol, coffee and some drugs deplete zinc. Take 15mg zinc daily.

Antioxidants

Take a good antioxidant formula that contains vitamins A,C,E, the minerals zinc and selenium plus bioflavonoids, lipoic acid, Co Q10.

Ginseng

Ginseng has a reputation for being a sexual rejuvenator. Animal studies have shown ginseng to increase testosterone levels, help the body adapt to stress and boost energy. Take Panax or Siberian ginseng 200mg x3 daily.

Damiana

This central American shrub is said to stimulate production of testosterone and increase the sensitivity of both the clitoris and penis. Take 400–800mg x3 daily.

Muira pauma

A native to the Brazilian Amazon, its mechanism of action remains unknown. In a

study in France, 62 % of the men claimed it had changed their lives. Traditionally used it to alleviate menstrual cramps and discomforts of menopause i.e. it tonifies the female sex organs. Take 1g a day.

Reduce Stress

Stress is a libido killer and is a major factor in the widespread decline in libido. If stress is prolonged or extreme, the response can have negative effects on many aspects of health including hormone balance. So it makes sense to help control the stresses in your life, and changing your attitude to them.

Excessive stress can also interfere with the thyroid – a symptom of low thyroid function (hypothyroidism) is low libido in both men and women. If you also have weight gain or difficulty losing weight, dry skin, water retention and depression, it may be worth getting your doctor to run a test to see whether hypothyroidism is behind your low sex drive.

Sort Out Erectile Dysfunction

There's nothing more than a fear of failure to 'perform' to put a man off sex. The inability to have or to sustain an erection can be caused by both psychological and physical factors. Physical problems can be due to drug side effects (e.g. beta blockers, antidepressants), atherosclerosis (blockage of the artery to the penis), nerve damage, including MS, and diabetes.

Men with erectile problems may be low in the male hormone testosterone. A substance called nitric oxide is responsible for controlling the physiological circumstances that generate and maintain an erection – increasing

blood supply to the penis and restricting the blood flow from it.

Nitric oxide molecules are produced in the penile artery wall from the amino acid arginine in response to nervous signals stimulated by sexual stimulation. The nitric oxide then triggers the dilation of the arteries, increasing blood flow into the penis. Blood flow is also vital for a women's sensitivity.

One of the ways in which Viagra works is by blocking the production of an enzyme that allows blood to drain from the genitals.

However, a more natural approach is to take herbs and nutrients that help maintain normal, healthy nitric oxide levels. Supplementing the amino acid arginine (found in nuts and seeds such as almonds, brazils, pumpkin and sunflower) from which nitric oxide is made, can help. I recommend 2 grams a day.

Look After Yourself

Many people with MS say they no longer feel sexy, or think others will not see them that way. Being sexy has a lot to do with feeling sexy. And, feeling sexy often relates to looking after yourself and taking care of your body – having a good diet, doing some exercise, enjoying relaxing activities and spending time on your physical appearance. Even simple things, like changing your hair style, can help.

Info Box

'THE LIBIDO PACK' is a formula consisting of a female/male multiple vitamin and mineral supplement which contains B vitamins, ginseng, antioxidants and zinc, together with the herbs damiana and muira pauma. Available from The Cornell Centre, who also do thyroid testing. The Cornell Centre @ Springhealth Leisure, Brian Close, Gloucester Avenue, Chelmsford CM2 9DZ Tel 01245-268098 www.susiecornell.com info@susiecornell.com

From Judy Graham:

As well as vibrators and aphrodisiac foods and supplements, there are drugs which could help do the trick – Viagra, Cialis and Uprima.

These drugs, designed to cure male erection problems, can also help some women, and even though research so far doesn't back this up much, they're certainly worth a try.

We did an article a while back in New Pathways on a woman with MS who took Viagra. She certainly got the fireworks she was after, though it doesn't have this corker of an effect on everyone.

Viagra, Cialis and Uprima all help improve blood flow to the genital area, the physiological event which must happen first if you want to get lift off.

These three drugs differ from each other in both how they work and how long they take to have the desired effect.

Viagra takes one hour to work. Cialis and Uprima work faster—about half an hour. Cialis also has a cumulative effect so you can still feel the the benefit a day later.

The hormone replacement therapy drug Livial is also a libido-booster.

You can feel blood flow in the genital area about 10–15 minutes after taking a tablet.

You may be able to get Livial from your GP. But unless your husband feigns erectile dysfunction and gets Viagra, Cialis or Uprima from your NHS doctor, you'll have to get them via the internet or privately and pay.

A trustworthy and reliable source (though not cheap) is:

Guardian Pharmacy based in Sweden. <http://www.european-pharmacy.com>.

