



Relationship & Sex Therapist

EMMA WARING

London Bridge Hospital's psychosexual nurse therapist** answers your questions

Q I've never had an orgasm and want to rectify this before I sleep with my new partner. Is this a medical condition? *Beth, 35, London*

A It's unlikely you have a physical problem but, for reassurance, you may want to visit your GP. There's a condition known as female orgasmic disorder, where orgasms are absent or less intense, but the underlying problem will usually be psychological. In previous relationships was your arousal the main focus? Take time now to explore your sexual side and discover what your body responds to.

Consider a visit to the London-based female run sex shop Sh! (sh-womenstore.com), which specialises in female-friendly erotic material, and buy a vibrator. Once you know what arouses you, you'll be more confident in bringing this into your sexual relationship.

However, try not to make orgasm the main focus. And remember that you're more likely to achieve an orgasm if you're in a relationship with someone you trust, so allow time for emotional connection and friendship before you consider moving into a sexual relationship.

Q My husband has had problems getting and maintaining an erection for almost a year and he's now avoiding intimate contact with me. Please help! *Sophie, 42, Essex*

A Your husband may be feeling confused and embarrassed, which is why he's avoiding intimacy.

Reassure him that erectile dysfunction (ED) is very common – 50% of men over the age of 40 experience problems. Keep communication lines open and seek help together.

Ask him about his morning and self-stimulated erections. If blood flow is restricted constantly, it could be an early sign of cardiovascular disease. As penile arteries are smaller than the heart's, men experience symptoms here first. He should visit his GP to have his cardiac risk factors checked – high

blood pressure, cholesterol levels and weight – and a physical examination to check for any unusual lumps and bumps. If performance anxiety is the cause, his GP may prescribe Viagra or Cialis to help him keep an erection in the short term and build his confidence. Try focusing on foreplay over penetration to alleviate performance anxiety.

There's a wonderful book called *Enduring Desire*^{*}, which explores how to maintain a good sex life at every age – why not try reading it together? If the problem persists, try a sex therapist – cosrt.org.uk (College Of Sexual And Relationship Therapists) will help you find a therapist in your area.



'How can we boost our sex life?'

I have a stressful job and I'm often not in the mood for sex. I feel guilty my libido isn't as high as my husband's. How can I keep our sex life healthy? *Sheryl, 46, Bedford*

I think you've highlighted a problem that lots of couples struggle with. Research has shown that sexual arousal patterns can differ for men and women. Men are more likely to experience spontaneous sexual desire, whereas women will often be in 'neutral', and then become aroused once they become intimate with their partner.

Explore what makes each of you tick. Do you need to connect emotionally with your partner before you connect

physically? Discuss, without blame or defensiveness, what each of you needs to stay connected. Once those needs are met, it sends positive ripples through your relationship, both emotionally and sexually.

Ensure you're getting enough sleep and agree some regular time to be emotionally and physically intimate with each other. It may seem clinical, but knowing you have a set time planned will reassure your husband and ease the pressure you're feeling. ♦