



**Frustration:** Only a third of us are satisfied with our sex lives

PICTURE: GETTY

# No sex tonight... I'm too stressed

Lack of libido is on the rise. **Helen Croydon** finds out what is turning us off and what can be done to help

**W**E LIKE to talk about it, it boosts TV ratings and if you were drawn to this headline, you clearly like to read about it. But apparently we don't want to do it. Sex, that is. A new report shows one in five of us has low libido, which is causing tension in a relationship.

The study for charity Relate also found that only a third of us are

**There is a prevalence of couples seeking therapy where one has gone off sex and it's causing problems**

satisfied with our life between the sheets, compared with nearly half two years ago. Almost as many again say they've experienced a sexual problem, like loss of desire or inability to orgasm.

So what's turning us off? The study included observations from Relate's sex therapists, who now rate low libido as third on the list of top relationship strains, after money worries and not understanding each other.

Peter Saddington is a clinical supervisor involved in the study:

'People used to seek sex therapy for problems like erectile dysfunction. But now there is a prevalence of couples where one has gone off sex and it's causing problems.'

Saddington says there are five main causes, all of which are on the rise...

**Depression:** 'This is now the most common reason people go to their GP. If you are depressed, your levels of serotonin and dopamine will be low and these play a role in desire.'

**Stress:** 'People are more stressed in their jobs than they used to be. The cost of things, the risk of losing their job and never switching off email are the common things I hear. When you're stressed, your body produces cortisol and adrenalin, and this turns off the hormones responsible for sexual desire.'

**Alcohol and drugs:** 'Clients tell me they self-medicate to cope with life. It may be smoking or drinking but all these things disrupt the balance of chemicals in our body, which affect desire.'

**Porn:** 'This is more prevalent as demands on our time grow.

With real sex you've both got to be available, interested and it takes longer. Masturbating is easier but when you do this all the time you won't be motivated for partner sex.

**Obesity:** 'If you're overweight, your heart and internal organs have to work harder just to survive, so you will lack the energy for sex. Also it can cause self-image problems and you can start to believe your partner is not interested in you.'

So can low libido be fixed?

'Some people have always had low libido,' says Denise Knowles, a psychosexual therapist. 'That's fine if their partner does too. But then there are the "gone-off-its" and that's when we see people seeking help, because it causes tension.'

'Often it's due to a life event like a baby, illness or redundancy and then we look at helping them cope with that. But often it's due to a lack of closeness or resentment.'

'The first thing sex therapy looks at is the relationship. It will likely uncover any underlying issues, so you have to be fully committed to a partnership to get the desire back.'



**Ease off: Too much booze won't help your libido**

## JUST NOT INTO IT? TIPS TO GET BACK INTO IT!

**Get checked:** If your libido drops mysteriously and nothing in your life has changed, see your GP first to rule out medical reasons like hormones, diabetes or blood pressure.

**Redefine sex:** Being sexual is not about sex but about thinking of yourself as a sexual person. Take time to pleasure yourself, fantasise, see who you fancy on the train. Start daydreaming, read erotic novels and ignite your erotic imagination.

**Connect:** If there is tension in a relationship with no care or sensuality, our bodies turn off and we start being ruled by our heads. Bring the tenderness back. Show an interest in each other, surprise each other with a massage. If you're content, you'll start to feel your flow of erotic energy.



**Take time for pleasure:** Try reading an erotic novel or having a bath together

**Savour the senses:** Don't focus on penetration. Find a gateway back to the body by engaging the senses. Cook a delicious meal together. Listen to some moving music. Walk in a beautiful place. Have a bath together. Slow down the autopilot.

*Advice from Louise Mazanti, psychotherapist and co-author of Real Sex (Hay House UK), out now*

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