

Painful sex and lack of sensation

Painful sex may be caused by vulvar vestibulitis, vulvodynia, or vaginismus. Burning and stinging pain is associated with vulvar vestibulitis or vulvodynia, while vaginismus involves painful vaginal muscle spasms that may occur during or in anticipation of penetration.

Lack of sensation may diminish a woman's desire, and can be related to hormonal factors, perineal injury, and pelvic surgery (including hysterectomy).

Getting to know your body

Knowledge of one's body and the physical mechanics of sex is essential, because it empowers women to have an understanding about their sexual response. See Resources at the end of this pamphlet for more information.

Psychosocial factors

Cultural and religious issues, stress, anxiety, sexual abuse and other psychosocial issues can impact a woman's desire. Psychological counseling may help resolve these issues and improve the quality of your sexual relationship. Counseling should be strongly considered in cases where all medical causes for decreased desire have been ruled out by a knowledgeable physician.

Other factors

Other sex-related difficulties may affect your desire for sex, such as problems with arousal

or orgasm. Contact your physician if you are having desire difficulties.

Resources

www.TWSHF.org- resource section

I'm Not in the Mood: What Every Woman Should Know About Improving Her Libido; Reichman, Judith. 1999. New York: Quill.

Getting The Sex You Want: A Woman's Guide to Becoming Proud, Passionate, and Pleased in Bed; Leiblum, Sandra and Judith Sacks. 2002. New York: Crown Pub.

What Your Mother Never Told You About Sex; Hutcherson, Hilda. 2002. New York: Putnam.

Becoming Orgasmic: A Sexual and Personal Growth Program For Women; Heiman, J and J. LoPiccolo. 1988. New York: Prentice Hall.

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Are You A Woman Experiencing DESIRE Difficulties?



**The Women's Sexual
Health FoundationSM**
www.twshf.org

WHAT IS DESIRE DISORDER?

In the *Journal of the American Medical Association's* 1999 report, 43% of American women had experienced sexual difficulties. Loss of desire was the most common difficulty, with approximately one-third of the women reporting a lack of interest or desire.

According to the *Consensus Panel Conference Report on FSD*, the name designated for lack of desire or interest is **Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD)**, and HSDD is defined as the persistent or recurrent deficiency (or absence) of sexual fantasies/thoughts, and/or desire for, or receptivity to, sexual activity which causes personal distress. While occasional lack of desire may occur from time to time, HSDD is the persistent or recurrent lack of desire. Even in cases where a woman may not be suffering personal distress from a lack of desire, if she is in a relationship, consideration must be given to the possible effects of her lack of desire on her partner as well as on the relationship.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF DESIRE DISORDER AND ITS TREATMENT?

The cause of HSDD may be of physical or psychological origin. The good news is that sexual desire problems are responsive to treatment. Knowledgeable healthcare providers address both the medical and psychosocial factors before prescribing treatment. Medications, hormonal factors, painful sex, and a lack of knowledge about the physical aspects of sex as well as psychosocial factors may contribute to HSDD.

Medications:

If you notice a lack of or diminished desire after starting a new medication, discuss this with your physician. Birth control pills, high blood pressure medications, and anti-depressants may impact sexual desire.

It is not totally understood how **birth control pills** affect desire. Talk to your physician about taking a break from birth control pills for a few months and using another form of contraception to see if this helps.

Diuretics and beta blockers may cause sexual dysfunction in men, and these same medications for **high blood pressure** may cause sexual difficulties in women.

Many **anti-depressants**, with the possible exception of Wellbutrin can cause diminished sexual response. Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs) are a class of anti-depressants which include Prozac, Paxil, Celexa, and others. SSRIs are more notable for causing sexual difficulties.

Ask the pharmacist for the package insert that comes from the pharmaceutical company so you can educate yourself on whether the medication that you are taking impacts desire or results in other symptoms associated with Female Sexual Dysfunction.

If you are concerned that the medication you are taking may be causing a lack of desire, speak with your physician. Ask for an alternative medication. If you are taking birth control pills, discuss using another method of birth control for a time.

Find out from your physician the importance of the particular medication to see if a lower dose (or discontinuing the medication entirely) is an option. Do not stop your medication or adjust the dose without speaking to your physician first.

Hormonal factors

Testosterone is a hormone that is found in both men and women. In women, testosterone is produced in the adrenal glands and the ovaries. Generally, testosterone levels will decline significantly in pre-menopausal women who have their ovaries surgically removed. A more gradual decline may be seen in peri-menopausal and post-menopausal women. Sometimes low levels of testosterone can occur in women who are in their twenties and thirties.

Testosterone levels can play a role in a woman's desire for sex. Along with other hormones, testosterone levels can be measured with simple blood tests. When HSDD is involved, blood work to test the following hormone levels should be considered:

DHEA, DHEA-S, androstenedione, total and free testosterone, dihydrotestosterone, sex hormone binding globulin (SHBG), estrone, estradiol, FSH, LH, prolactin, and TSH. It is recommended your physician order free testosterone blood work to be done by the equilibrium dialysis method. It is thought to be more accurate than other methods labs use.