

## MAIL TODAY

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**W**HILE ENDLESS articles appear on the lack of libido, nothing much is said about the opposite—extreme lust. Why is it that some people have a sex drive that's much higher than usual, which often leads them to seeking multiple sexual partners, or even more than the average amount of sex from their relationships? A decreased libido is usually a cause for concern but a desire for more sex is not viewed as a problem. "Usually it is the woman who complains about excessive sexual demands. In a male dominated society such as ours this problem often goes unnoticed," says Dr Rachna Singh, consultant psychologist, Artemis hospital. So what is it that provokes this condition, one might ask. What causes the desire for sex to heighten to such an extent that it becomes a nuisance and may actually need treatment?

### IT COULD BE GENETIC

"Nature and nurture play a great role in libido and the desire for sex," says sex therapist Dr (Col) SK Wadia. "While there are no clear cut figures or research to support this, the degree of an individual's sexual desire may be genetic." He adds that today's liberal environment coupled with the spirit of sexual adventure is likely to fuel this sexual drive, which then increases to overpowering levels.

"There are no clear cut lines to define what too much sex is. If a man with a high libido finds a match in his partner then there is no problem. But when the desire to have sex takes over a person's life and renders it dysfunctional, then the psychological and physical condition should be analysed," says Dr Wadia.

### HORMONE PROBLEMS

Aside from the psychological factors that contribute to a high libido, physiology could be responsible too. A hormonal imbalance within the body might provoke the libido to go into overdrive. "Every one of us has both male and female hormones. When the levels change for some reason — the estrogen levels drops, and the testosterone levels shoot up — this impacts the libido," explains Dr Wadia, adding that an imbalance in the thyroid related hormones — T4 and TSH can also affect the sexual capability of a person.

A high testosterone level may be the result of injecting testosterone, a very common practice by athletes and body builders. Dr Amrish Mittal, senior consultant endocrinologist, Apollo Hospital, says that this is on the rise, as many gyms advocate this

practice without considering the repercussions. A tumour can also lead to testosterone levels peaking. A high testosterone level does not necessarily lead to a high sex drive, say doctors. But if the tendency is present and the external environmental encourages it, it might lead to this condition. In selected cases, certain medications can also create an excessive sex drive.

### IT CAN BE AN ADDICTION

We all know about sex addiction through the highly publicised lives of several actors, including Michael Douglas, Angelina Jolie's ex husband, Billy Bob Thornton, comedian Russell Brand and most recently David Duchovny. Sex addiction revolves around a set of destructive, compulsive behavioural patterns. They are distinct from what would be a naturally high libido as they impinge on the addict's everyday life, placing great strain on relationships, and in some cases making it difficult to function normally. People addicted to sex get a sense of euphoria from it that seems to go beyond that reported by most people. The sexual experience is not about intimacy for them.

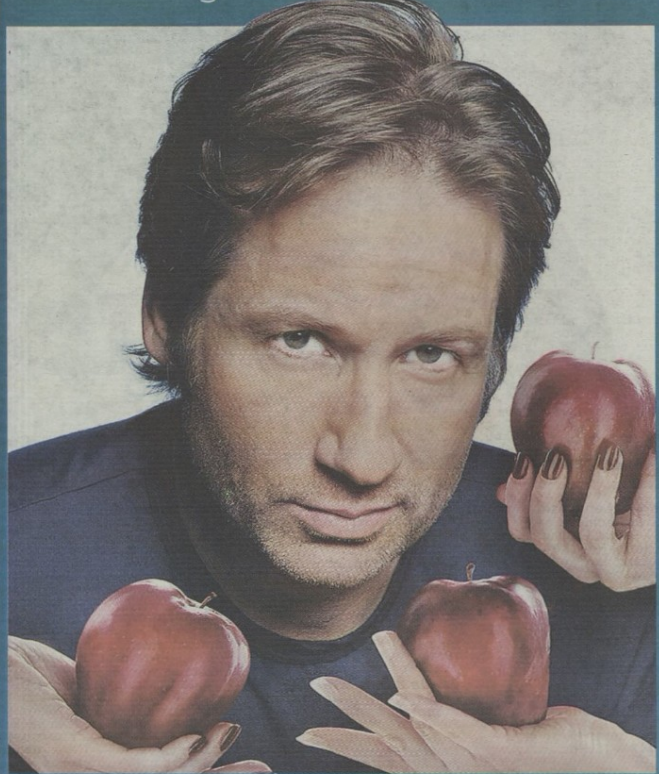
"Addicts use sexual activity to seek pleasure, avoid unpleasant feelings or respond to outside stressors, such as work difficulties or interpersonal problems. This is not unlike how an alcoholic uses alcohol," says Dr Wadia. In both instances, any reward gained from the experience soon gives way to guilt, remorse and promises to change. Dr Rohit Juneja, spiritual psychotherapist and relationship counselor says, "Sex addicts can find themselves thinking about sex as much as 80 per cent of their waking time. This may go on even though they are gainfully employed and successful at their work. Such addiction need not only be in the mind nor is it limited to pornography, addicts may find partners who enjoy sex as much as themselves or may find ways to attract numerous partners." There are no hard statistics to measure the full extent of the problem, though experts have said it is more visible among males, who are more likely to pay for sex or visit porn websites, but as many as one in three addicts are believed to be women.

### LOOK FOR THE SIGNS

Behaviour traits common among sex addicts include being secretive about sexual activities from loved ones or the drive to have sex in places where people they would not normally choose. Whereas some amount of sexual adventure and the need to read or view pornography is normal and healthy, an excessive degree indicates a problem. Those who are addicted to sex thrive by looking for sexually arousing articles or scenes in newspapers or magazines and feel the need to increase the variety and fre-

# DESIRE IN OVERDRIVE

A high sex drive often goes unnoticed until it runs amok and leads people into making self-destructive choices



X-Files actor David Duchovny admitted himself into rehab for sex addiction last year

quency of sexual activities to bring the same levels of excitement and relief. This conduct is invariably accompanied by feelings of personal shame at the behaviour, leading to feelings of hopelessness, alienation and, in some cases, suicide, says Dr Samir Parikh, HOD psychiatry, Max Hospital adding that this is when the individual should seek psychiatric help and counseling.

### COUNSELLING WORKS

There is no treatment for treating this kind of hormonal imbalance in India. "In the West, there are injections and medications which chemically castrate a man suffer-

ing from this problem and lead to bigger health issues in the future," says Dr Wadia. Any hormonal treatment would lead to changes in the body that may result in impotency and other sexual problems. Other health consequences involve the heart, memory, bone density and muscle mass, warns Dr Wadia.

Dr Parikh adds that while biochemical imbalances and abnormalities in the brain also contribute to an excessive desire for sex, very little has been established by concrete research. Behavioural modification and treatment not unlike that for other addictions is recommended for anyone with sex addiction. In the West, this addiction is given

as much importance as an addiction to alcohol or drugs and there are rehab centres with concrete programs designed to help people deal with it. Sex addiction in our country is unfortunately, rarely identified to be a problem and usually is detected in during counseling to treat other problems. Psychological counseling is of great help, as it allows the individual to modify his thought process and the way he perceives sex and relationships. "Behavior modification therapy like cognitive behavioural therapy and regular psychological counseling can help a person overcome sex addiction," says Dr Wadia.

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