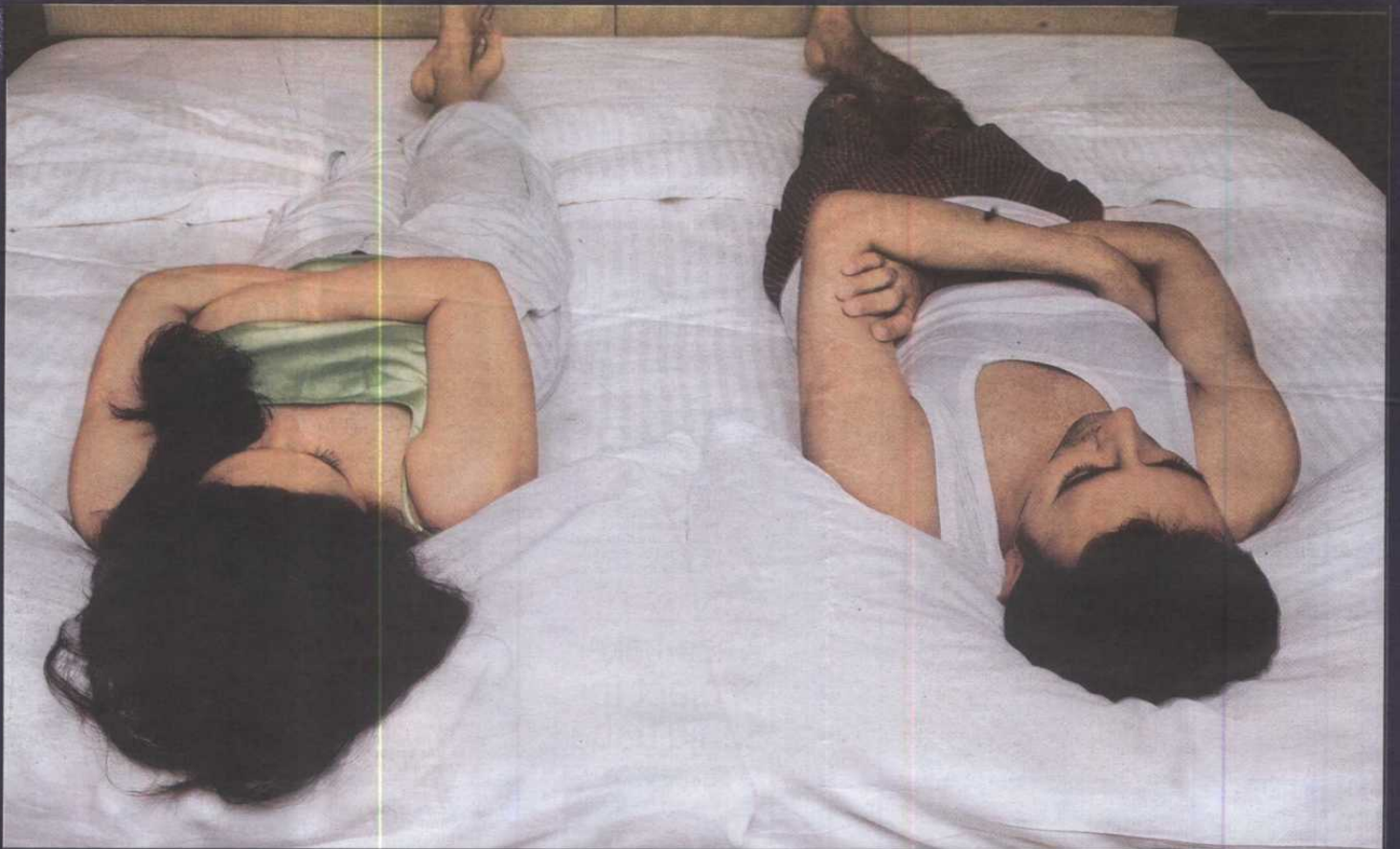


Mail Today

Rev up your lukewarm libido



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A flagging sex drive can put the brakes on your bedroom antics and diminish your zest for life. But the good news is that getting over this sexual slump is easy enough! Read on to discover how

BY SASWATI SARKAR

ISN'T IT scintillating to be in the midst of a no holds-barred era of steamy sex when group dating and cyber sex are almost the norm, and gadgets and Buddha bar music are essential to turn up the heat in the bedroom? Or so we believe. But the truth is that it's a Catch-22 situation. Once the curtains are pulled together, the darker side of this aphrodisiac flurry emerges. The reality is that sex is being pushed into the back seat for many, and low libido has interrupted the sexual tango of many yuppie couples, adding to all the other intriguing problems being flung by life at them.

"Though lack of sex drive is regarded as a mid-life crisis, I am seeing an alarming rise of this problem among the younger urban couples as well," confirms Dr Ajit Saxena, a senior andrologist with Apollo Hospital. True, more and more relationships are now under strain because one is feigning a headache, while the other is starved of sex. But the big questions are how did it come to this and what are the ways out?

All those who may be going through a dry spell in the bedroom may want to read further, and understand the multifarious reasons for this problem. While some are common to both men and women, others are gender specific.

Fatigue is the chief culprit

Fatigue is a major libido sapper. This increases the level of the hormone cortisol and simultaneously decreases testosterone and estrogen, which directly influence your sex drive. What results is the Double Income No Sex (DINS) syndrome, which is catching up with career-minded power couples. Stress hits from many directions—career woes, challenging teenagers, financial worries, and impossible dreams! With so many demands on your time and attention, sex is the last thing on your mind. 38-year-old Sujata, a mother of two and an IT professional says that she has no energy for sex at the end of the day. Interestingly, the less sex you have, the less you want, so putting sex back on the agenda is crucial. Sujata's gynaecologist told her the same. "She and her husband only needed to make a few lifestyle changes like cutting down on work hours and socialising to create more opportunities for sex in their lives," explains Dr Anuradha Kapoor, senior consultant, obstetrics and gynaecology, Max.

Sexual issues brought on solely by stress and fatigue often can be remedied simply by taking a vacation. Take a weekend break and go for a trip to resume pleasurable lovemaking in a pressure-free environment. Use this time off to review your lifestyle and consider ways in which you can create a healthier balance between work and play; nutritious food, drinking ample water, getting proper sleep, a regular exercise plan with yoga ensure a stress free life, thereby enhancing your sex drive.

Don't forego the foreplay

Impatience in the bedroom is a lust killer for sure, especially for women. So guys, spend more time on elaborate foreplay. A woman's body takes longer to warm up,

and unless her partner spends time romancing with her, painful sexual intercourse may result. This, in turn, dampens the libido and lessens a woman's desire for a man. As far as sexual satisfaction is concerned, the shortest distance between two points—from arousal to orgasm—is not necessarily a straight line to the genitals. So the lesson for men who want their women to be lusty for them is to focus on foreplay and the whole body (yes, even her toes!) to boost libido.

Talk your way out

Tension in a relationship can certainly dampen one's sexual urges. "For men, anger and frustration can hinder erection. Likewise, the breakdown of trust can be devastating to a woman's ability to reach orgasm. Both partners can suffer loss of libido in a conflict-ridden circumstance," explains relationship expert Vandana Shrivastava. Despite the so-called sexual era we live in today, many are still conditioned to believe that sex is a dirty word after all. Women especially suffer the impact of the age-old preaching that 'it is for him and not for her'. Getting over this idea by talking to more liberal friends or even a

LIBIDO BOOSTERS

GO FOR A ROMANTIC DINNER
A candlelit dinner with a bottle of wine is a good way of boosting serotonin and other hormones. Dress up in your sexiest clothes for this meal, and touch lightly throughout the meal to boost sexual thoughts and up your sex drive.

MUNCH A HANDFUL OF NUTS
Brazil nuts, almonds and pumpkin seeds have high levels of an amino acid called arginine, which helps increase the levels of blood in the genitals. Experts call them the natural Viagra.

RELISH CHOCOLATE
Chocolate is believed to be an aphrodisiac. Savour good-quality chocolate high in cocoa solid (60-70 per cent) content as this contains a chemical called phenylethylamine, known as the "love drug". This chemical mimics the brain chemistry of a person in love.

GO FOR A JOG OR SKIP
Did you know that just 15-20 minutes of exercise a day improves your blood flow and makes you feel more horny!



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Spend some time apart

The paradox of modern relationships is that greater intimacy sometimes reduces the lust factor of physical intimacy. "Extreme familiarity with each other's body and mind that develops from the daily bonding or togetherness makes sex more of a routine and less of a high. What seeps in is a boredom which impedes desire," observes psycho analyst Rama Arora. The only way to keep the excitement level up in a regular, long-term relationship is to manipulate some sort of a distance. Spending time apart, pursuing individual activities help build anticipation and sexual lust. Make your partner wait for you. This will automatically rekindle the passion.

Other libido dampeners

Those who drink regularly might feel instantly sexual and all ready to go. This is a false alarm though, since alcohol depletes your libido over time. Smoking is even worse, since it is directly related to the erection mechanism. Experts say that it releases enzymes that reduce blood flow by narrowing the blood vessels in the sexual organs contributing to your low libido. Some medical ailments are also libido killers, such as an under active thyroid, diabetes or cardio vascular issues as they affect your blood flow to the genitals.

For men only

Being unable to get an erection or maintain this diminishes a man's libido. Erectile dysfunction (ED)—the inability to achieve and sustain an erection suitable for sexual intercourse — can be caused by diseases that affect blood flow, such as atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) nerve diseases, psychological factors such as stress, depression, and performance anxiety and injury to the penis. Chronic illness, certain medications and a condition called Peyronie's disease (scar tissue in the penis) can also cause ED. There are different ways ED can be treated, including oral medications, sex therapy, penile injections, suppositories, vacuum pumps, and surgery. Talk to your doctor to determine the best treatment for you. A depleted testosterone level also takes away your sex drive. Parminder Singh, a 42-year-old accountant could not consummate his marriage for 12 years long years because his low testosterone level came in the way of his performance. But the doctor's recommendation of testosterone replacement was effective in restoring his sexuality. "It finally enabled him to enjoy his share of sexual bliss too," says his consultant Dr Saxena.

Women's woes

Painful sex diminishes a woman's desire for it. A contraction of the vaginal muscles—vaginismus—is sometimes the cause. This has its roots in psychological factors like painful past experiences, notion of sex as a wrongdoing and the likes. "This is a condition which tightens the vaginal muscles and makes sex very painful. It can be compared to the response of the eye shutting when an object comes towards it," explains Dr Kapoor of Max Hospital. A psychological counsellor should be consulted to get rid of the fear factor that causes the vagina to contract. Another possible culprit behind your low libido may be the contraceptive pills you pop. A study published in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that the extra dose of estrogen and progesterone increases your levels of SHBG (sex-hormone-binding globulin), which makes testosterone stick to your cells, preventing the hormone from flowing freely through your system. The non-flowing testosterone causes some women to lose their desire for sex.

Hormonal changes during pregnancy or just after you have a baby and during breast-feeding can also put a dampener on sex drive. However, other factors like fatigue, changes in body and the pressures of caring for the new baby can also contribute to your drop in libido. Another period in life that impacts the sexuality of several women is menopause. Contrary to popular belief, menopause actually stretches over a decade for women, and during this transitional period, there is a drop in the levels of estrogen which helps maintain the health of your vaginal tissues and your drive for sex. Your doctor can recommend systemic or local estrogen therapy — by pill, patch or gel — which will improve your brain function and the mood factors affecting your sexual response during this time.

(Some names are changed to protect their identity)

counselor is crucial to acquiring healthy ideas about sex and sexuality. Communication is essential for partners to build the trust needed for a successful sexual relationship. "By talking frankly about your feelings, you can foster acceptance and understanding in your relationship. This will definitely enhance your libido as sex is an extension of your emotional bondage," advises Shrivastava.

Dispel performance anxiety

For both men and women, the fear factor stems mostly from the apprehension of failure or inability to satisfy. Experts say that most men are threatened by women who are passionate and assertive on bed. Premature ejaculation also interferes with a woman's sexual satisfaction. Women too are concerned about pleasing their partners, and whether they are responsive enough or smart enough to be considered good bed partners. These anxieties ultimately evaporate the very desire to get cozy. If you have any such issues, do consider counselling or sex therapy. "Sex therapy includes education about sexual response and teaches sexual techniques too. This helps many regain their confidence on bed and boost their libido," says Megha Hazuria Gore, clinical psychologist with Max hospital.

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Build body confidence

28-year-old Shagufa was always very conscious about being over-weight and her fleshy lower abdomen. "Going out with my husband and chatting endlessly was fine. But when the time for sex came around, I just couldn't get into the mood to shed clothes. After several sessions with a counselor, I discovered that my discomfort with my lower abdomen was to blame. It took us 1 year to consummate our marriage and even now I make it a point that the lights are off," she says. A low self-image does not always originate from appearances alone. It is also linked to a low self esteem especially for men. This can spark a downward spiral of repeated sexual failure. 30-year-old Deep went through a sexual low after he was denied a promotion at work. "I didn't feel like having sex as I felt like a failure in life in general," he confesses.

Acquiring body confidence is essential to feeling good about yourself. So start walking or eating less sugary and starchy food and doing whatever else it takes to feel good about your shape.