

THE CELEBRITY LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE

# at home

WITH GLORIA HUNNIFORD

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# Keep your SEX LIFE

## HEALTHY

CHANGES IN SEXUAL DESIRE ARE COMMON AS YOU GET OLDER BUT TALKING OPENLY ABOUT YOUR PHYSICAL NEEDS AND CONCERNS IS THE BEST WAY TO ADDRESS ANY PROBLEMS. HERE ARE SOME TREATMENTS THAT CAN HELP

**A**ren't these supposed to be the golden years for all long-married couples? The kids are grown up and you have more time for each other.

But what if you and your partner start having issues with sexual intimacy – or problems that have been excused for years become much more obvious?

'My message is that all these problems are fixable – too many couples suffer in silence and it can lead to relationships breaking down,' says GP Dr David Edwards, a past president of the British Society for Sexual Medicine. 'Sex is the glue that keeps couples together, and getting older doesn't mean that your sex life has to end.'

We take a look at six common sex problems and their latest treatments.

### 1 VAGINAL DRYNESS

Around 57% of women over the age of 50 suffer from vaginal dryness; a consequence of falling oestrogen levels after the menopause. This causes the tissue of the vagina to thin and become inflamed – a condition doctors call vaginal atrophy. Painful intercourse due

to vaginal dryness is now estimated to affect 50% of women at some stage in their life.

However, one study published in *Menopause* journal in 2013 found that 37% of women with vaginal dryness did not seek medical help and, of those who did, 40% waited a year before doing so.

'This is so common, but women just don't think to mention it to their doctors, and don't know why this is happening or what they can do about it,' says GP Dr David Edwards. 'There are vaginal lubricants and moisturisers available on prescription, and some which you may buy over the counter. Oestrogen creams may also be helpful.'

Dr Edwards says products such as Yes, a natural vaginal lubricant, can be prescribed by doctors and bought via mail order ([www.yesyesyes.com](http://www.yesyesyes.com)). It has a pH (acidity/alkalinity balance) that matches what is recommended by the World Health Organization guidelines.



## 2

**ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION**

'ED affects 2.5 million men in the UK and 50% of men over 50,' says Dr Edwards. 'Yet most men don't tell their doctor. Ignoring it is not just bad for their relationship but for their health, as ED is often a symptom of other problems, such as heart disease and Type 2 diabetes. ED is also common after surgery to remove the prostate gland.'

Cricket legend Sir Ian Botham, 60, revealed in August that he sought help to prevent ED: 'I hope it becomes a talking point. There's nothing to be embarrassed about.'

Treatments include:

- **Lifestyle changes:** Giving up smoking, lowering blood pressure, cutting cholesterol, losing weight and taking more exercise can all help.
- **PDE5-inhibitor drugs:** Medication, such as a PDE5 inhibitor, may be needed. They

work by increasing blood supply to the penis. Sildenafil (Viagra) has to be taken an hour before sex. Vardenafil (Levitra) and avanafil (Spedra) can be taken half an hour before sex, and tadalafil (Cialis) is taken daily.

- **Pumps:** Use a vacuum pump to increase blood flow to the penis. 'See a specialist nurse for instructions,' says Dr Edwards.

- **Shockwave therapy:** A newer treatment, publicised by Sir Ian Botham, is linear shockwave therapy, which he said 'can wind the clock back on your sex life'.

Not available on the NHS, he had Vigore ([www.vigore.co.uk](http://www.vigore.co.uk)), a £3,000 treatment that uses acoustic sound wave therapy to encourage the growth of new blood vessels in erectile tissue.

- **Sex therapy:** 'ED may have a psychological cause,' says psychosexual therapist Trudy Hannington. 'Seeing a therapist trained by the College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists ([www.cosrt.org.uk](http://www.cosrt.org.uk)) can help.'



# 3

## LOWER LIBIDO IN WOMEN

The medical name for this is hypoactive sexual desire disorder. 'This is when women lose their libido repeatedly,' says Dr Edwards. Treatment options are:

- **Flibanserin:** This new drug is licensed in the US to treat HSDD, although not in the UK, yet flibanserin has a number of side effects, including interaction with alcohol and low-blood pressure, and doesn't appear to have a

marked effect on libido. 'Research evidence suggests women who take it will only have one more episode of sex a month,' says Dr Edwards.

- **Testosterone gel:** 'Women often respond to a low dose of testosterone gel applied to the skin; it's a treatment licensed for men, but can be used off-label in women in much smaller quantities.'

- **Sildenafil:** 'There's a case for prescribing low-dose sildenafil via off-label GP prescription to women having issues with arousal.'

- **Tibolone:** 'A drug that has slightly androgenic (masculine) effects, but can increase sex drive in women if given at a low dose.'

- **Sex therapy:** Trudy says: 'One in two women over 50 have sexual health problems – they talk about losing their confidence, having poor body image and lacking sex drive. Counselling or therapy can help.'



# 4

## STRESS-RELATED LOSS OF SEX DRIVE

'This is common in men and women – they get overloaded with work, juggle this with family commitments, become stressed and tired – and their sex drive crashes,' says Dr Edwards.

- **Lifestyle changes:** 'Reducing their workload, sharing domestic chores, taking time out for themselves, exercising and learning to relax can all help to reduce stress and tiredness,' he adds.

- **Rhodiola Rosea:** A herbal remedy once used by the Vikings for stamina has been found to boost sex drive. Rhodiola Rosea root is licensed to treat stress, anxiety and exhaustion.

Dr Edwards ran a trial in his patients, prescribing a Rhodiola supplement called Vitano ([www.schwabepharmaco.uk/product/vitano-rhodiola-tablets](http://www.schwabepharmaco.uk/product/vitano-rhodiola-tablets)) for stress, anxiety and exhaustion, as a different option to antidepressants.

Patients were given two 200mg tablets a day and 71% reported an improvement in their symptoms within three days. These positive results continued for four weeks.

'Then the husband of a patient I'd prescribed Vitano for said whatever the pill was that I'd given her, it had done wonders for their sex life,' says Dr Edwards. 'Anecdotally, Rhodiola seems to do something for sexual performance. It's not that surprising as sexual problems are common in those who are stressed and exhausted.'

# 5

## VAGINISMUS

'This is when women suffer involuntary tightening of the muscles around the vagina when penetration is attempted,' says Trudy. 'It can make penetration difficult or impossible, or sex painful. In older women, this can happen as a result of post-menopausal vaginal shrinkage, or lack of sexual intercourse.'

'It can be treated by using vaginal trainers – penis-shaped devices that help the vagina to dilate and relax. Amielle is a brand that is recommended by sex therapists.'

# 6

## TESTOSTERONE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME

'Some men suffer from low levels of the male sex hormone testosterone – called testosterone deficiency syndrome – a condition that affects about 8% of men over 50,' explains Dr Edwards.

'The symptoms include a lack of sex drive, low moods and little enthusiasm for events or activities that they previously enjoyed.'

'Some women describe the medical condition as "grumpy old man syndrome".'

'It is underdiagnosed and undertreated, despite testosterone hormone gels and injections being available on NHS prescription! ●'