

Sexual Desire Disorder

Provided by Psychology Today

Definition

Lack of sexual interest.

Symptoms

- Communication problems
- lack of affection not associated with continuing into sexual intercourse
- power struggles
- lack of time alone together
- A very restrictive upbringing concerning sex, or negative or traumatic sexual experiences
- Physical illnesses and some medications
- Psychological conditions such as depression and excessive stress may inhibit sexual interest
- Fatigue
- Individuals who were victims of childhood sexual abuse or rape, and persons whose marriages are lacking in emotional intimacy are particularly at risk

Causes

Some types of depression run in families, suggesting that a biological vulnerability can be inherited. This seems to be the case with bipolar disorder. Studies of families in which members of each generation develop bipolar disorder found that those with the illness have a somewhat different genetic makeup than those who do not get ill. However, the reverse is not true: Not everybody with the genetic makeup that causes vulnerability to bipolar disorder will have the illness. Apparently additional factors, possibly stresses at home, work, or school, are involved in its onset.

In some families, major depression also seems to occur generation after generation. However, it can also occur in people who have no family history of depression. Whether inherited or not, major depressive disorder is often associated with changes in brain structures or brain function.

Treatment

The majority of the time, medical evaluation and lab tests will not reveal a physical cause. However, testosterone is the hormone responsible for creating sexual desire in both men and women. It may be useful to check testosterone levels, particularly in men who have ISD. Blood for such lab tests in men should be drawn before 10:00 a.m., when male hormone levels are at their highest. Interviews with a specialist in sex therapy are more likely to reveal possible causes.

Treatment must be individualized to the factors that may be inhibiting sexual interest. Some couples will need relationship enhancement work or marital therapy prior to focusing directly on enhancing sexual activity.

Some couples will need to be taught skills in conflict resolution and be helped to work through differences in nonsexual areas.

Many couples will also need direct focus on the sexual relationship wherein through education and couple assignments they expand the variety and time devoted to sexual activity.

When problems with sexual arousal or performance are factors, these sexual dysfunctions will need to be addressed.

Prevention

One major way of preventing ISD is to reserve time for nonsexual intimacy with one's partner. Couples who reserve weekly talk time and time for a weekly date alone without the kids, will maintain a closer relationship and are more likely to feel sexual interest. Couples should also detach sex and affection, so that neither one is afraid to be affectionate on a daily basis, fearing that it will be interpreted as an invitation to proceed to intercourse.

Reading books or taking courses in couple communication, or reading books about massage may also encourage feelings of closeness. For some individuals, reading novels or viewing movies with romantic or sexual content may also serve to encourage sexual desire.

For too many couples, sex gets what is left over late at night. Regularly reserving "prime time," before exhaustion sets in, for both talking and sexual intimacy will encourage closeness and sexual desire.

When both partners have low sexual desire, the issue of sexual interest level will not be problematic in the relationship. Low sexual desire, however, may be a barometer of the emotional health of the relationship. In other cases where there is an excellent and loving relationship, low sexual desire may cause a partner to repeatedly feel hurt and rejected, leading to eventual feelings of resentment and promoting eventual emotional distance.

Sex is something that, for most couples, either bonds their relationship closer together, or something that becomes a wedge that gradually drives them apart. When one partner is significantly less interested in sex than their companion, and this has become a source of conflict and friction, it is recommended that professional help is needed before the relationship becomes further strained.

By: Psychology Today Staff

Originally published by Psychology Today: 20021010

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