



DepressionAlliance Scotland

Depression and Your Sex Life

You Are Not Alone

If you are depressed and have lost interest in sex, don't worry—you are not alone. Surveys show that about two out of three people who suffer from depression lose interest in sex. It's important to understand that this lack of interest is as much a symptom of depression as feeling low. Both probably result from imbalances in brain chemistry. Reduced sexual activity may also be accompanied by weight loss, reduced energy and disturbed sleep.

What Sort Of Sexual Problems Are Common?

A general loss of interest in sex is the most common problem. Other problems include:

- Not being able to get sexually aroused
- Lowered sexual performance
- Not being able to gain pleasure
- Lack of energy
- Not being able to get or keep an erection
- Premature ejaculation
- Not being able to ejaculate or reach orgasm

Will Treatment Help My Problems?

Modern antidepressants are very effective in treating depression and as your depression gradually lifts, your interest in sex should return. However, some antidepressants may make sexual problems worse or cause new sexual problems. This does not mean you should stop taking medication.

Talking to your doctor should sort out whether it's the depression or the medication causing the problem. Changing the dose, using an extra medicine, or taking a different antidepressant may help.

What Are The Main Sexual Side Effects Of Antidepressants?

Loss of sex drive, erection problems, failure to have an orgasm and delayed ejaculation are common in men. Whilst women may experience loss of desire, vaginal dryness and difficulty having an orgasm.

Are Sexual Side Effects Common With All Antidepressants?

No. Some of the newer antidepressants are less likely to cause the sexual side effects that you may experience with the older types.

Must I Talk About This, I'm Embarrassed?

A good sex life is an important part of health and well-being, so it's important to talk to your doctor about any problems. If you had sexual difficulties before starting treatment, they are probably part of your depression. If they began during treatment, they may be a side effect of your medication.

Try asking a general question like, "I've lost interest in sex. Is this normal?" or explain "since I've been on these drugs I seem to have a slight sexual problem". Just try to explain your feelings and any difficulties. Your doctor may be able to suggest some other form of help such as counselling, psychotherapy or marital therapy, or may change your medication.

If you have concerns about your sex life during treatment with antidepressants, please answer the following questions. Your answers will help you to communicate to your doctor how your sex life has been affected by your treatment.

Since the start of your treatment with antidepressants:

- How has your desire for sex changed?
- Do you become as aroused as you are used to?
- Can you enjoy sex at the moment?

Women

- Has your ability to achieve orgasm changed?
- Are you satisfied with the intensity of your orgasm?

Men

- Can you get your normal erection?
- Can you maintain your normal erection?
- Do you have any difficulty in ejaculating (i.e. coming)?

But My Doctor Hasn't Asked Me About My Sex Life!

Some doctors may wish to ask you about your sex life but they worry that you will be offended or feel that it is 'none of their business'. By bringing the subject up yourself you can create the opportunity to get the help you need.

What Else Can Affect My Sex Life?

- Some other illnesses and conditions which can cause sexual problems include, diabetes, multiple sclerosis and high blood pressure.
- Other medicines which may cause sexual problems include drugs prescribed for high blood pressure, some lipid-lowering agents, anti-histamines, anti-epilepsy drugs and drugs often prescribed with antidepressants to reduce anxiety (anxiolytics), insomnia (sleeping pills) and severe mental disturbance (antipsychotics).
If you are taking antidepressants you should tell your doctor about all other medication you are taking, including medicines bought in pharmacies or other shops. This should help prevent any harmful reactions between drugs.
- Many 'street drugs' (for example cannabis, opiates, amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy) may also cause sexual difficulties.
- Some people who are depressed drink too much alcohol—often because they think that it will make them feel better. In fact, too much alcohol will probably make you more depressed and it certainly increases sexual problems.

Summary

If depression or its treatment is causing problems in your sex life, there are three important things to remember.

- You are not alone—this is a common problem with depression
- Continue taking the medication that you have been prescribed
- Contact your doctor and talk through your problems—they can be solved!

Further Help

For more information about depression or Depression Alliance Scotland please contact us.

Depression Alliance Scotland

3 Grosvenor Gardens
Edinburgh EH12 5JU
Tel: 0845 123 23 20 or
0131 467 3050
Fax: 0131 467 7701
Email: info@dascot.org
Web: www.dascot.org

Other Useful Organisations

The Samaritans

Tel: 08457 90 90 90
Email: jo@samaritans.org
Web: www.samaritans.org

Saneline

Tel: 0845 767 8000
Email: sanemail@sane.org.uk
Web: www.sane.org.uk

Breathing Space

Tel: 0800 83 85 87
Web: www.breathingspacescotland.co.uk

Relate Scotland (*Previously known as Couple Counselling Scotland*)

Tel: 0845 119 6088
Email: enquiries@relatescotland.org.uk
Web: www.relatescotland.org.uk

Further Reading

Depression and Sexual Function
David Baldwin and Sally Thomas,
Martin Dunitz Publications, London 1996

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