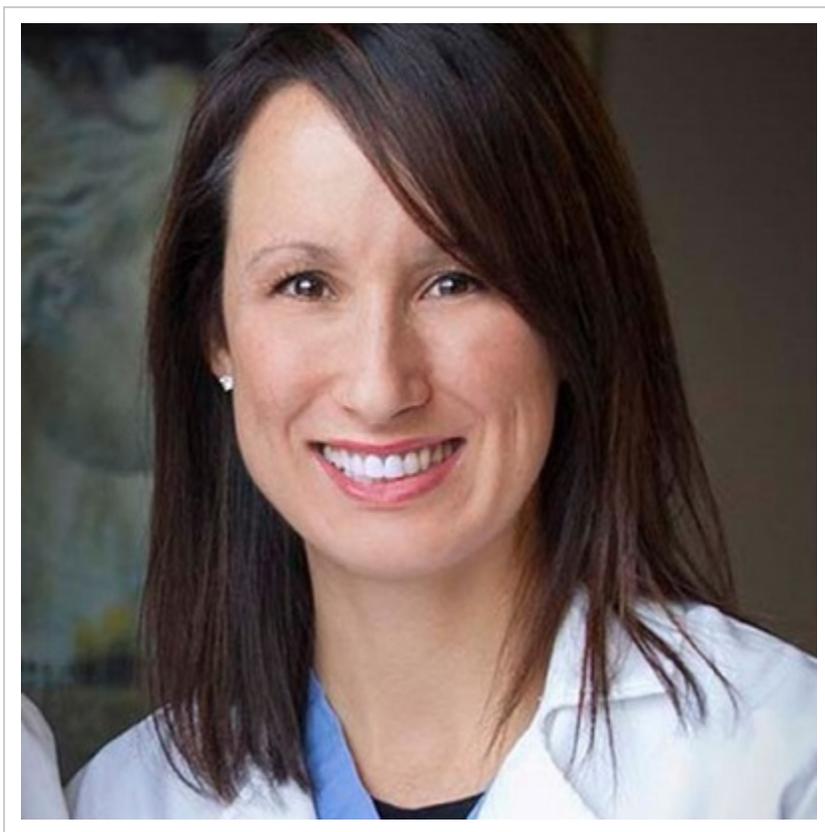


Let's Talk About Sex

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It's the "S" word. The word we all think about, but few of us dare talk about. So many reasons exist for this, both socially and culturally. But when we really get down to it, what's stopping us? Regardless of the number or type of relationships we choose, there tends to be a fundamental need to involve sex in some way. So why are we afraid to bring it up? Nisha McKenzie, PA-C at Grand Rapids OB/GYN offers some tips for addressing these concerns with your healthcare provider, as well as your significant other.

Let's think of it another way. Let's talk about finances. We understand the importance of being on the same page as our partner here. Most will have regular conversations with their partners and even consult a financial advisor to help educate ourselves. And if our financial status changes, we talk about it again. We also understand that we may save or spend money differently than our friends and neighbors, but we develop a comfort with what works for us. Sex and intimacy are no less important to a relationship, and should be no less customized to our own lives. But first we need to know we can talk about it. Now is the time. Now it is important to start normalizing our discussions about sex.

According to a recent on-line survey conducted by Merck, women are less assertive when it comes to initiating discussions about their sexual health than they are about any other important aspect of their lives. Why is this? Do we think we don't deserve sexual satisfaction? It's true, historically women were told their purpose was to conceive and to satisfy their husband. But we now know there can be even more to women's sexual lives than this. Every

woman deserves to understand and to further educate herself regarding her own sexuality.

So where do we start? Who is a safe person to talk to? And how do we bring up the conversation? Let's start with the most common concern I hear from women in my office. Drumroll please....

"I just don't have any interest in having sex".

Is that what you were going to say? This is a common problem and does not just affect menopausal women. In fact, up to 43% of women suffer from some form of sexual dysfunction, as opposed to 31% of men. The majority of women will say their lack of interest in sex does cause distress in their relationship. And as if we don't already feel badly enough about our lack of desire, surveys have shown that 40-50% of women blame themselves for their low libido.

If you find yourself fitting into this description, here are a few tips to help you start your process to your healthier sexual self:

- **Visit your medical provider.** There are many reasons for decreased libido ranging from Diabetes to Depression. There are also multiple things that can contribute to pain during sex, which in turn, can decrease the desire to want to have sex. Certain medications can also result in decreasing libido, sensation, or arousal. Once all of these conditions have been ruled out, your provider may have a discussion with you about Female Sexual Interest/Arousal Disorder and options for addressing this. You may even consider asking your partner to join you at your appointment so they might better understand what is happening for you.
- **Find a relationship or sexual therapist.** Talking is a vital part of resolving our sexual problems, regardless of the number of pills, creams, lotions, and enhancements scientist discover. Let them help you understand that the two of you are struggling to cope with changes in your sexual relationship. This struggle creates a bond between you, one that you can overcome better as a team, versus you against your partner. And understanding this struggle empowers you to reclaim control of your own sexuality.
- **Take sex off the table.** Set a reasonable amount of time that you and your partner agree to not have sex. No matter what. However, kissing, touching, massaging are all still very much on the table. This will help you both learn how to focus on intimacy without sex. Make sure you touch your partner at least 10 times every day. Small, seemingly inadvertent touches, brushing a hand across the back, all add up by the end of the day. You may be surprised at how pent up you may start to feel after wanting what you can't have!
- **Spontaneity.** This could mean having sex in a different room, in a different position, at a different time of day, or maybe dropping a pair of panties into his briefcase. Conversely, know your limits, and if you know you'll be too exhausted at the end of the day, plan a lunch time excursion. The novelty of that alone is sure to excite.
- **Vacation sex.** There are plenty of studies to show the negative effect stress can have on our libido. So within the limits of your own budget, find a time to get away. Whether it's a tropical island vacation or a staycation after sending the kids to a friend's for the weekend. Take the time to focus on each other and forget about normal everyday stressors, just for a bit. Simply enjoy your time alone and the ability to enjoy each other. If you're lucky, maybe the euphoric feeling of lust and romance will even spill over for a couple of days afterward!
- **Exercise.** Exercise is an important part of our everyday health, including our sexual health. Research has shown that exercise primes the body for sexual arousal. Aerobic exercise also releases natural endorphins, or so called

feel good hormones, creating more energy throughout the day. Not to mention what exercise can do for our self esteem.

- **Girls night out (or in).** Poll the girls. You may be shocked at how many have similar difficulties and are willing, perhaps even eager, to talk about it! Start the conversation here, learn what has worked for them, and what hasn't. Get ideas about medical providers who specialize in sexual health and ask about their experiences there.

For help finding a medical provider who specializes in sexual health, visit these websites:

[American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists \(AASECT\)](#)

[International Society for the Study of Women's Sexual Health \(ISSWSH\)](#)

[North American Menopause Society \(NAMS\)](#)

[Grand Rapids OB/GYN](#)

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