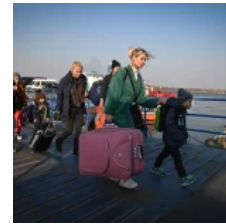


How to kickstart your libido: Schedule sex, sleep for eight hours and book a holiday

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Couples should get comfortable with the idea of pleasure and flirting rather than going straight to sex (Photo: Willie B Thomas/Getty)



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By Emma Reed

February 6, 2023 5:00 pm (Updated 6:02 pm)

For every libido-charged *Love Island*-er gracing our screens, there are plenty of people across the UK who are wondering if their own sex drive has escaped to a remote and barren island, never to return. Although still a relatively taboo subject, loss of libido is common, affecting up to one in five men and more women at some point in their lives, according to the NHS.

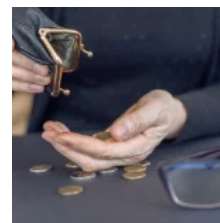
Recent **trials** by Imperial College London of (the appropriately named) hormone kisspeptin found that it can be effective in treating Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD) – where **low libido has endured over many months**. This hormone shot, which is administered by injection, works by increasing brain activity that is linked to arousal and attraction.

One 44-year-old man who was taking part in the trial – because his low sexual appetite was so badly impacting his relationship – went on to conceive a son in the week following the hormone injection. Talk about a quick result.

But without resorting to such extreme measures, is there a way that you can **lure your libido out of hiding** and kickstart your sex life again?

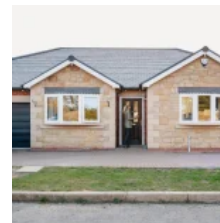
Why does low libido happen?

Dr. Adiele Hoffman, a GP and medical adviser at Flo, the period and ovulation tracker, explains that there are myriad factors that can



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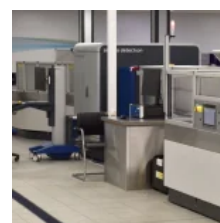
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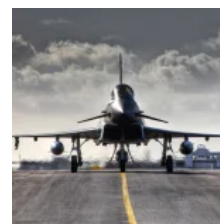
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impact loss of sex drive, ranging from depression to childbirth, ageing, **the menopause** and medications taken for things such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Sex drive fluctuates during a person's life as physical and emotional wellbeing changes.

Stress can also have a huge impact on libido. "Stress is a big factor when it comes to sex drive," says Hoffman. "A stressful lifestyle can also make it difficult to get a good night's sleep and poor sleep has been linked to reduced arousal in women and a higher risk of erectile dysfunction in men".



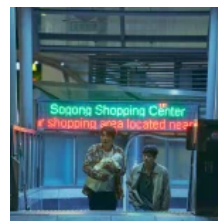
Low sex drive is common, but it's something couples might find hard to talk about (Photo: Tara Moore/Getty)

According to sex and relationship therapist **Cate MacKenzie**, we shouldn't panic when we are experiencing a loss of libido. "Sex drives go up and down. A person might have suffered illness, stress at work, they may have lost a parent, be experiencing a loss of confidence or lost sleep looking after children and that's when they withdraw. It's very normal."

How to fix it

Reducing stress

Mind and body are inextricably linked. "Learning to handle [stress] in a positive way can help increase your libido, which in turn can help your body relax and may help to boost it," says Hoffman. "Meditation can be a great way to help cope with stress". This also includes making sure you're getting enough sleep. "There is a medical treatment route depending on each individual case," says Hoffman, "but whatever



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stage you are in, you can try and target your exercise, sleep and stress levels.”

Exercise

“It might sound obvious, but exercise can often help. Exercise is a great natural libido booster and can also help with the underlying causes of loss of libido such as low mood and erectile dysfunction. For women, kegels can help strengthen the muscles of the **pelvic floor**, the same ones that contract during orgasm,” Hoffman says.

Find pleasure

Mackenzie says it's important for the person who has lost their sex drive to find a way back to themselves, starting with things not necessarily directly linked to sex, but to pleasure. “Find your pleasure pathways. Keep a journal and notice what experiences give you joy. Sensual experiences such as taking a bath, dancing, or having a massage will ignite oxytocin. Try exploring the top erotic experiences in your life and imagine the experiences you would like. Write about two deeply erotic experiences and what you felt. Listen to something erotic online, perhaps leading to touching yourself and masturbation.”

Don't jump straight to sex

For Mackenzie, it's important to get comfortable with the idea of pleasure and flirting, before sex. It also takes time, especially if you haven't had sex for a while. It's all about the slow build. Adopting a gearstick analogy, Mackenzie says: “Seventh gear might be intercourse with sixth gear being naked, but first gear is ‘hello.’” It's absolutely key to focus on ‘hello.’ It's important to bring a bit of calm, fun and joy into the relationship.”

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Get away where possible

Mackenzie is a huge advocate for getting away one night a month, if possible, away from the distractions of life at home. “It’s really important that this night away is not about sex,” she says. “Accept that sex might not happen and that you’re doing it for fun. It’s about flirting and taking the pressure off. Pressure is anti-sex and stress hormones cancel out the sex hormones. You might end up having a shower together or a snuggle in bed.” If you can escape for a few days, even better, as it often takes a couple of days for couples to relax.

Brain boosts, Goop herbs and sperm whale extract

Between 1500 and 1900, deer musk (secreted from the chest glands of mountain deer) and ambergris (a waxy excretion from the intestines of sperm whales) were traded as luxury aphrodisiacs throughout Asia, the Middle East and Europe.

In 2015, Flibanserin became the first FDA-approved treatment for sexual desire disorders. Unlike Viagra, which affects blood flow to the genitals, Flibanserin is designed to boost levels of brain chemicals. It has not been approved in the UK.

Vyleesi, a self-administered injection that was licenced in the US in 2019, also works by stimulating brain receptors. The evidence of success is limited, and it has also not been approved in the UK.


Wellness brands such as Gwyneth Paltrow’s Goop sell supplements including DTF (Down to f***) with fenugreek and saffron, to boost female libido. However, there is no strong evidence to support the £40 product’s claims.

Schedule in time

While scheduling time together feels less than romantic, Mackenzie points out there’s a reason people have more sex in those early days of a relationship; it’s because they’re making the effort to go on dates. “You have to get in the zone,” she says. “Unless you schedule, you’re not even building up to anything.” Relationship hygiene is also key. “I work with couples who are working all day and they go to bed with their screens. Perhaps have a no-screen Sunday or turn them off by nine o’clock,” she says. Having a conversation instead helps you to connect, which may help you connect physically.

Accept that this is likely to happen

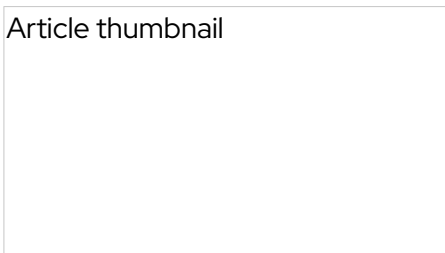
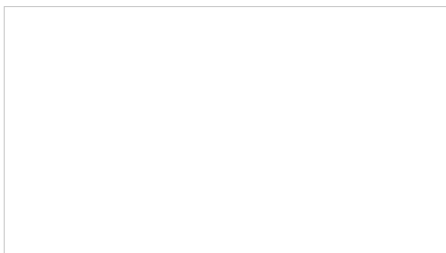
Accept that your sex drive will ebb and flow. Looking after your

physical needs, along with starting on the slow but rewarding journey of pleasure and fun, may even lead to some of your best sex yet. 

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