

## Men: Boost Your Libido!

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Freelance

Flip open a magazine, turn on the television or surf the Web, and within seconds you'll encounter imagery designed to raise the mercury in your thermometer. Sex is used to sell everything from motor oil to phone books, and fashion trends unravel evermore threads of women's clothing.

One of the first realities to be aware of is that Madison Avenue is probably more sex crazed than you are. A man's libido may simply not be able to keep pace with the onslaught of innuendo in advertising, and recognizing this may actually provide some relief. Nonetheless, sex can be incredibly preoccupying. If sexual energy could be rerouted to another part of the brain, the average guy would probably be able to understand metaphysics and solve the square root of pi.

But what is "enough" sex? Should a man of any age worry if his sexual engine slips from fifth gear into neutral?

"Libido is often thought of as a single-person event, but it's really a couple-related phenomenon," says Dr. Harry Fisch, a leading New York urologist and author of *The Male Biological Clock*. "Someone who's older and having sex once a month might not complain about not having enough sex. But the person who might complain is the wife or girlfriend. It's a relationship, and it takes two."

### Diagnosing the Dip

If you and your partner do suspect that your libido is not all it could or should be, a low testosterone level is the likely culprit. [Testosterone](#) is the hormone most responsible for male characteristics such as muscle development and facial hair as well as aggression, competitiveness and sexual drive.

It's common and natural for testosterone levels to drop by 1 percent to 2 percent every year beginning at age 30. The dwindling supply of male sex hormones, or androgens, is known as andropause, a kind of equal-opportunity name for male menopause. Or, as Dr. Fisch calls it, *menoporsche*. "I call it 'menoporsche' because I've seen guys who think buying a hot new car like a Porsche will give them a shot of sex appeal or attractiveness," he laughs, "when in fact they'd be much better off getting their testosterone level checked."

Some men produce low levels of testosterone even before the age of 30. Regardless of age, one result of this condition, known as hypogonadism, is decreased libido. The condition is treatable. Testosterone replacement therapies introduce more of the hormone to a body that could not supply enough on its own. Another method is anti-estrogen therapy: Just as women have small amounts of testosterone, men have small amounts of the female hormone, estrogen. Anti-estrogen therapy helps re-establish an appropriate balance. Of course, all such options should be discussed with a qualified urologist, since there are risks and side effects.

The best option, however, is to get the body to produce more testosterone on its own. Before you even consider medical alternatives, there are several avenues to explore. And the first thing you can do is ...

### The Last Thing You Want to Hear

That's right, diet and exercise. In case you missed the memo—or didn't catch the underlying message in every health article you've ever read—here it is again: A healthy diet and regular exercise can change your life for the better in countless ways, including a boost to your sex drive. However, there are a few surprises.

Body fat is an opponent of libido in two ways: It inhibits testosterone production, and it breaks down testosterone already in the system. The male hormone and all its characteristics, including libido, disappear into fat cells. And here you were worried that your extra poundage was going to turn her off. It's turning you off, too.

This is especially true of fat around the abdomen, because belly fat absorbs testosterone more efficiently than any other fat cells in the body. To raise libido, the challenge is not so much to reduce weight as to reduce waist size. It's a pretty safe bet than a man with a beer belly or a "Buddha" belly has lower testosterone levels and therefore lower libido. Buddha himself probably had low libido. Look how enlightened he was.

### Head Space

The male population has a reputation for always being in the mood, but in truth, men's sex drive is deeply entangled with state of mind. In fact, any man coping with [depression](#) should have his testosterone levels checked.

Psychology professor Charles Hill, of Whittier College in California, further explains that "depression can reduce libido, along with interest in other areas of life. So can [anxiety](#). Concern about work and other pressures can crowd out interest in sex. Any source of stress, really, can reduce libido." A quick-fix prescription won't necessarily correct the problem, either. Anti-depressants, it has been widely noted, can suppress libido. Alcohol, which many people abuse in a form of self-medication, will also diminish drive.

The cruel twist for some men is that sex is actually the source of the stress. With premature ejaculation as the most common sexual dysfunction, many men simply shut themselves down. "Prior failures in attempts to perform sexually or to create relationships can create performance anxiety, which sabotages future efforts [to have sex]," says Hill. "Prior sexual abuse can also cause problems. A psychologist can help address these issues."

You may already suspect that psychological baggage is weighing on your libido. To have a healthy and happy sex life, it may be crucial to get your mental space in order. You have to clean out the garage before you can pull the car in.

### Down on the Upside

Viagra is probably the most celebrated drug since the polio vaccine, underscoring that we're as concerned about sex today as people 50 years ago were about walking. But it's important to note here that drugs for [erectile dysfunction](#) (ED) do not do anything for libido. The ability to have an erection is a distinct issue from the desire to have one. ED drugs are successful in overcoming psychological issues but they work poorly for men who have low testosterone.

With body and mind in good working order, a man should be able to get a rise out of life at any age. As Dr. Fisch concludes, "Men who maintain their health can have the desire for sex until the day they die."

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