

The Top 3 Questions People Have About Sex

When people learn what I do for a living, it is usually only matter of time until they start asking me questions—whether it's via email from my readers, or an off-the-cuff moment with the check-out person at the grocery store. And I love answering them! (Given I don't have a cart full of melting frozen foods, lol). If you know me, then you already know that I'm happy to answer your questions, any time! I love answering these questions, because helping people feel better about their sexuality and helping people to talk openly and honestly about their sexuality is why I became a sex therapist. In order of most frequently asked, below are the three most common questions I receive about sex.

1. Am I Normal?

Even after all of these years, this is still the most frequently asked question. Whether it is regarding their sex drive (which I'll talk about in more detail in my last question), the frequency of sex, genitalia appearance, fantasies, or sexual interests—everyone just wants to know if they are *normal*. In general, I can say: Yes, you are normal! How do I know this? I know this because, in general, sexuality is a broad spectrum, with lots of room for individual differences. Unfortunately, many people learn about sex and sexuality from movies, television, and fiction novels. I say 'unfortunately,' because these sources aren't great for providing an accurate picture of "what is normal." Movies that portray two young, hard-bodied stars having sex like rabbits, don't show real people what sex is really like between two "normal," average people. To start, most actors/actresses spend quite a bit of their time perfecting their physical appearance. This is their job—but for most of us, we don't have that kind of time. If you do, that's great! For the rest of us, we will always be working on that one part of our bodies that doesn't seem to want to shed those last few pounds. We don't have the perfect tan, perfect teeth, or wake-up in the morning with fresh breath and our hair and make-up done.

In addition, unless you are still young (in movie land I'd say that's aged 18-25) and new in a relationship, chances are you won't fit that description. It is *normal* for people who have been together for a long period of time to slow down in their frequency of sex. The national average for couples in long-term committed relationships of several years is once per week. This number decreases if there are additional stressors in the relationship like pregnancy, small children, financial strain, and/or any big life changes (i.e., a new job, moving, etc.). Of course, to the contrary, when those same couples go on a romantic vacation and shed all of their daily stressors, it's not unusual that they might have sex several times that week. With the exception of a few, most movies, TV shows, and books do not portray the reality of the average sex life, in couples in long-term, monogamous relationships. Much like most things in life, there is an ebb and flow to the frequency of sex. When things are great and stress is low, that is when you can expect more flow!

Finally, it is important to note that if someone has gotten most of their information about what is normal from watching porn, they are definitely going to have a skewed view of things. I believe this is why so many young men contact me regarding questions about the "normal size of a penis." If you're curious, the national average is 5.5 inches, with the average range being from 5.1 to 5.9 inches. Surprised? If you are, then you might be one of those people who have based their understanding of what's normal on a cinematic exaggeration. Of course the men in the porn industry are going to have above average penis length. Why? Because that's what sells! For the same reason, we are seeing more and more people in porn with completely shaved genitals, augmented breasts, bleached skin around the genitals and anus, and 'perfect' skin tones. It sells. Unfortunately, it also puts forth a very poor representation of what is "normal" (or even REAL for that matter!).

2. How Can I Talk to My Partner About Sex?

If you're struggling with communicating your sexual thoughts and feelings to your partner, you are not alone. I would say that, on average, approximately 70% of the cases I see in my private practice and about 80-90% of the cases I've seen at Survivors of Abuse in Recovery (SOAR, Inc.) involve at least one partner who has difficulty communicating their sexual thoughts and feelings to their partner. First of all, you have to know what feels good and what you like. You can't communicate this to someone else, if you don't know this for yourself. We can't expect our partners to know more about our bodies than we do. Spend some quality time with yourself to determine what you think feels good, so you can then communicate that to your partner.

If you do know what you like and are struggling with how to communicate that, remember that it's great to be open and honest, but you also need to be careful not to be accusatory. For example, try saying, "I really love it when you do _____. Or, "I'd really love it if we could try _____." Remember to stay away from saying "You always / You never" statements, as these are accusatory. For example, "You never touch me where I want you to. Or, You always rush to having sex." In the last example, if you'd like more foreplay, you could say something like, "I'd love it if we could slow down a little. How about we _____." If you feel up to it, try to lead by example. If you'd like more foreplay, try to set that tone yourself. Also, it is always great when you reinforce what you do like. For example, letting them know by saying, "I loved how much time you took with me before sex last night. I felt really cared for and it got me really excited!" You can also try to give other cues during the activity, such as moans or other sounds of excitement, to let them know that what they're doing feels good.

It is also important to note that if you have been struggling with this for some time, and still can't seem to communicate your sexual thoughts and feelings, it may be time to seek the help of a couple's counselor.

3. Where Did My Sex Drive Go?

Before you start to worry that something may be "wrong" with you, I first recommend that you go see your doctor, to rule out the possibility of an underlying medical issue. Make sure that your practitioner takes blood and tests you for normal hormone levels. Also, ask them if any of the medications you are taking could cause problems with libido—including over-the-counter meds and herbal supplements. Many women who experience problems with sexual functioning after menopause report increased vaginal dryness, weight gain, skin changes, and stiffness in muscles or joints. If you think that this may be part of the problem, talk to your doctor. I also highly suggest purchasing a good, quality lubricant. My favorite lubricant for women is Pjur Eros Bodyglide Original. It has a very natural feel, it is long-lasting, latex safe, and it doesn't get sticky.

If you've checked with your doctor, and there is no possible medical reason for a loss of sex drive, you may be over thinking things. Lack of sleep, lack of exercise, and poor nutrition can all cause a drop in libido. Moreover, one of the biggest contributing factors to problems with sexual desire is STRESS. So, if you feel like you've lost your mojo, you may want to look at your job and personal life for the answers. Are you under more stress than you have been at work or at home? If the answer is yes, then your work is really to develop a self-care plan that helps you to deal with stress better. One way of doing this is to carve out time for you to relax and rejuvenate. Some healthy coping mechanisms for stress are: taking a Yoga or Pilates class; going for a walk with a partner or friend; getting a massage; and/or taking some time off from work (even if it is just a 3-day weekend!).

Another way to work on addressing concerns with your libido is to find things that are a turn-on for you, and put more energy into those activities. For many women, reading erotica helps to increase their sexual thoughts and feelings, leading to a boost in their libido (this is what helped make *Fifty Shades of Grey* a bestseller!). If all else fails, there are several herbal supplements, for both men and women that can help

boost libido. I recommend going to your local Vitamin Shoppe, and taking a look at what they have in their sexual health section(s). They have several options! ☺

☼ **Happy Summer everyone!** ☼

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Dr. Dianna Palimere is a Psychosexual Therapist and Licensed Clinical Social Worker. She has been in the field of mental health for the past 12 years, dedicating the past seven years to specializing in clinical sexuality. She holds a Bachelors degree in Psychology, a Masters degree in Social Work, a Masters degree in Human Sexuality Education, and a PhD in Clinical Human Sexuality. Utilizing a holistic approach to therapy, she incorporates a variety of clinical interventions in her work with individuals, couples, and families. She is devoted to helping people achieve sexual health and healing through her work as a psychotherapist in her private practice in Pike Creek, DE; as well as in her work with local nonprofit organizations. To learn more about her or to schedule an appointment, visit her website:

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