



*Sex and relationships* *Lifestyle / Family & Relationships*



Luisa Tam

## The Naked Truth | Sexual dysfunction in women: why it happens, how to overcome it, and why it's OK not to want sex

Women can lose interest in sex for many reasons – it's quite normal, especially as you get older; but there are ways of reviving your libido

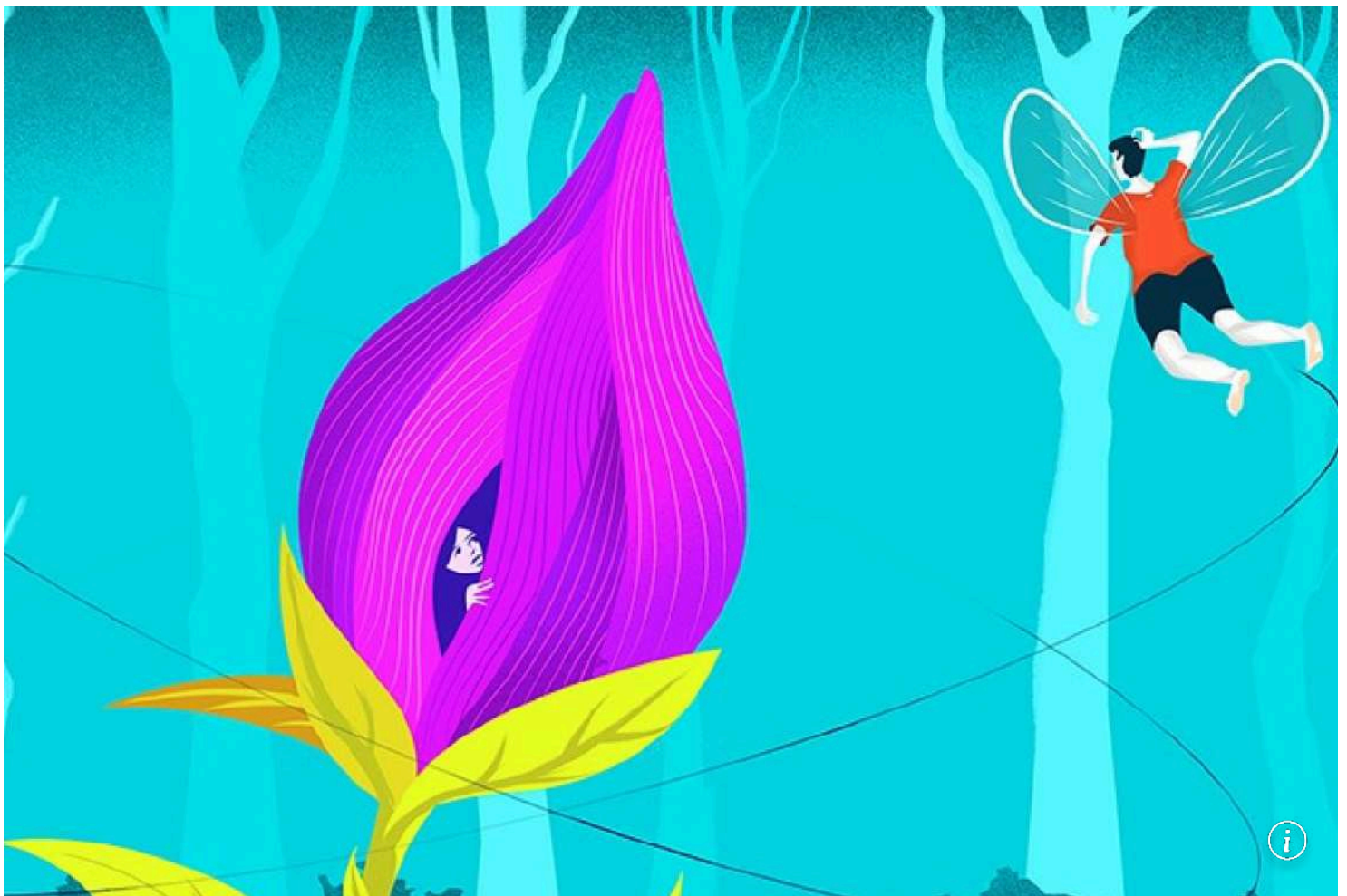
Follow seven steps to get back a good sex life, if that's what you want, and understand what causes your desire to fluctuate

Reading Time: **4 minutes**

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### **Luisa Tam**

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Sexual desire is affected by physical, hormonal, emotional, psychological, and social factors. Your libido fluctuates with your physical and emotional state, and the condition of your relationship.

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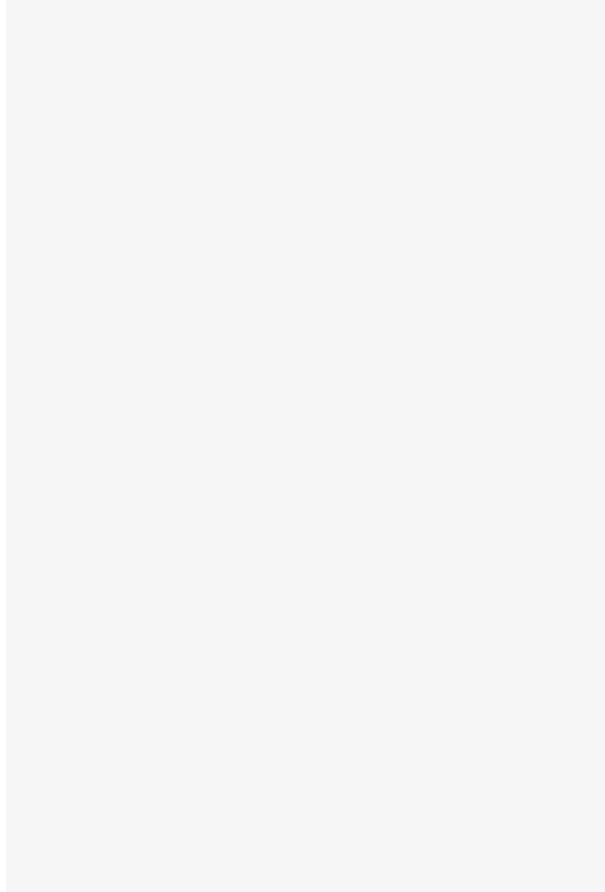
When this happens we often fret about our sexual prowess, but it is perfectly normal, and fixable.

Last week, [this column focused on erectile dysfunction](#). This week, we examine the issues surrounding female sexual dysfunction, which are not discussed enough and may be poorly understood, meaning many women feel unprepared and on their own when they experience it.

Sexual inhibition or lack of sexual interest in women has many causes – anxiety, depression, stress, physical illness, medication, lack of sleep, relationship issues, age, hormone-based contraceptives, hormonal imbalances, a history of unfulfilling sex, past incidents of shaming about sex.



A DJ arouses the crowd at a nightclub in China. A woman's hormones and neurotransmitters need to be in harmony to her to function sexually, and feeling desired is an important turn-on for many women, psychologist Dr Kristin Zeising says. Photo: Alamy



Sexual functioning requires a balance between neurotransmitters and hormones. If there is even the slightest imbalance, a woman's appetite for sex will drop. Relationship issues such as lingering anger or resentment, lack of communication, or an absence of trust can also lower sexual desire.

“Women in long-term relationships can often experience a loss of desire, as they may crave more eroticism, variety, or spark in their sex lives ... Feeling desired by one's partner is an important turn-on for many women,” says Dr Kristin Zeising, a clinical psychologist and certified sex therapist at MindnLife, a Hong Kong-based private psychology practice.



Women aren't meant to always want sex

— Dr Kristin Zeising

“A history of feeling shamed for sexual expression can impact desire and cause a woman to be more inhibited. Historically and culturally speaking, female sexuality is often stigmatised ... Other factors include past sexual traumas, religious upbringing,

or even unsatisfactory sex, and women feel uncomfortable discussing these issues with their partner for whatever reason,” Zeising adds.

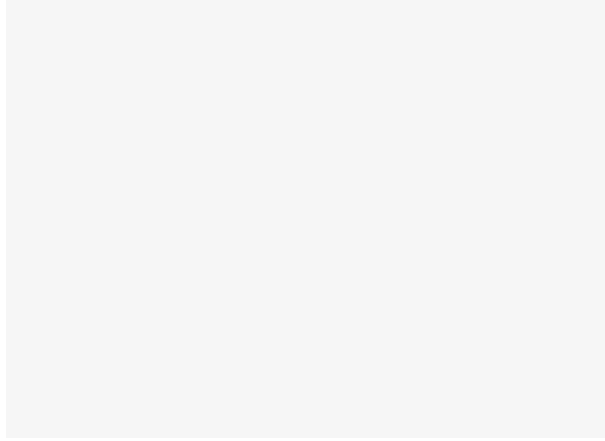
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Loss of interest in sex is widespread, and affects between 25 per cent and 50 per cent of women, depending on which part of the world they live in, she says. Asian and Middle Eastern women are more likely to experience a lack of sexual desire, and sexual problems such as an inability to reach orgasm, Zeising says.

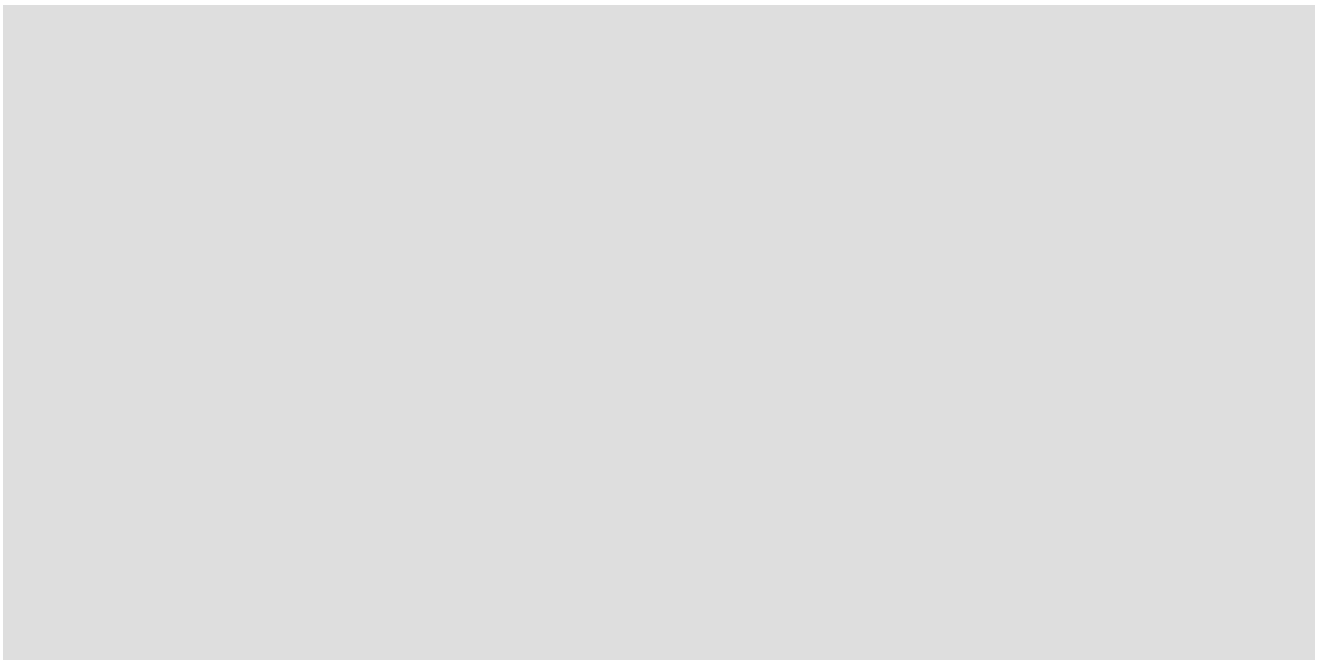
“Women of all ages and cultures can experience a lack of desire at some point in their lives, so it’s quite normal and common. Women aren’t meant to always want sex, in whatever context or situation. In some cases, a woman may not desire sex on a regular basis – or at all – and they are perfectly fine with that.

“However, it’s when a woman is feeling like her body has changed, or when their partner desires sex more than they do, that a depleted sexual appetite becomes problematic.”

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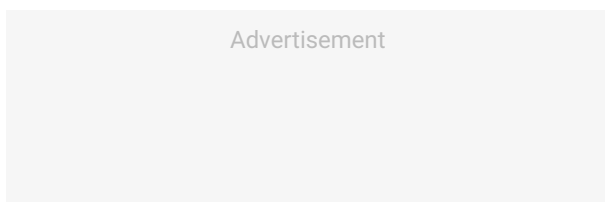


Many middle-aged women are vulnerable to low sexual functioning. They find that, as they age, their hormone levels drop and their bodies may need more stimulation than they previously did.



The ability to achieve orgasm doesn't necessarily decrease with age, but what stimulates women to experience pleasure may change as they get older. Photo: Alamy

“As oestrogen levels drop, the vaginal tissue thins and dries out, and this can make sex painful enough to put women off the act altogether,” Zeising says. “For many women, the reduction of oestrogen alone explains a nosedive in libido. But other aspects of menopause may also leave them feeling unsexy and not desiring sex, like mood swings, hot flushes, weight gain, and anxiety about ageing.”



#### FURTHER READING

[The Naked Truth | Not in the mood for sex? Tips for couples to get primed for passion](#)

[Sex after 60: how to make it exciting, pleasurable and comfortable](#)

[1 in 4 young adults in Japan are 'sexually inexperienced': study](#)

When that happens, she says, women should talk to a gynaecologist about medication and other solutions to make sex more comfortable.

Zeising says feeling positive about ageing and about a partner tends to outweigh the physiological effects of declining hormone levels.



You may be surprised to find that having [a] conversation about potential new sexual acts or even things you like is a turn-on. Don't shoot down the idea before trying it

— Dr Kristin Zeising

Preconceived ideas about sex in older age can unconsciously reduce desire too; research shows that women who believe sexual desire diminishes with age are twice as likely to experience low desire than women who don't buy in to this myth.