

MAZE

GUIDE TO WOMEN'S SEXUAL HEALTH



My sex drive took
a nosedive after
I had my baby.
Is that common?



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WOMEN'S SEXUAL HEALTH

MazeWomensHealth.com

TAKE OUR QUIZ

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A **mommybites**® GUIDE



What Happened to My Libido?

Many women find their [libido drops](#) dramatically after the birth of a child. And at the time, it makes sense—new moms are stressed out and tired. They don't have enough time to take a shower, let alone have sex. Often women are told that it's all in their head—but, in fact, there are many factors, both physiological and psychological, that contribute to that “do not enter” sign on her door.

First, women *are* tired and stressed. Taking care of children is more work than we ever anticipate. Also, they may feel over-touched. Who wants to have their nipples fondled after they just spent the morning breastfeeding?

Another factor that contributes to a low postpartum libido is how a woman's self-image changes after giving birth. As the mother of three, can you still be the hot babe who walks naked into her husband's shower with a bar of soap and two glasses of wine?

With more responsibility for the house and the kids always seeming to fall on her, a new mom might be angry at her spouse. Even if she's not acting angry, there may be a pervasive frustration that is affecting her desire to make love with her partner.

And don't forget the most significant contributor...**hormones!** These have likely shifted significantly during the pregnancy and afterwards. (We are just starting to understand the importance of hormones in a women's sexual life and her ability to become

aroused.) This is not a condition that a glass of wine or a romantic dinner can fix.

Because hormones are key components of a healthy sexual response, low levels of testosterone-related hormones, estrogens, and DHEAs can contribute to a low sex drive. When these hormones shift or drop after pregnancy, it can directly impact libido. Other factors such as stress, sleep deprivation, breastfeeding, and restricted calorie intake may also have an impact on libido.

In general, a new mom should realize that her [low libido](#) is likely a combination of several issues—and resolving those issues starts with becoming more educated about her postpartum body, mind, and sexuality. [Maze Women's Sexual Health's](#) free [Postpartum Sex E-Book](#) is a good place to begin that journey—which really is worth the effort. A good sex life will make the difficult child-rearing years ahead so much easier for every couple.

For more information and a free 10-minute phone consultation, [contact Maze Women's Sexual Health.](#)

Pelvic Pain? Don't Suffer in Silence!



For women who have experienced painful sex, just the thought of having intercourse might make them cringe. Even if the pain is inconsistent, it can have a debilitating psychological effect on a woman's desire and arousal, and it can erode her ability to experience sexual pleasure.

WHAT CAUSES PELVIC PAIN AND DISCOMFORT?

[Vulvodynia](#) is pain in the vulva that lasts for over three months. The pain can be described as

burning, stinging, rawness, or even itching. It can occur with intercourse, but frequently women will have pain when wearing tight clothing, or even while sitting. It can be caused by tight muscles, hormonal changes, nerve irritation or allergic reactions.

Vaginismus is caused by an involuntary tightening or spasm of the pelvic floor muscles. The muscles can become tight enough to make sex uncomfortable, painful, or even impossible. When women have long experienced this pain, it's known as **Primary Vaginismus**. (Women often become aware of it when they are unsuccessful at inserting a tampon or they feel muscle spasms during a speculum exam.) It is typically accompanied by anxiety and fear of any penetration. **Secondary Vaginismus** occurs when women have had a healthy, pain-free sex life but then suddenly experience significant pain with penetration. This is also commonly known as pelvic floor hypertrophy, and can result from hormonal changes, post-surgical issues, medications, menopause, or trauma.

These are the most common conditions causing pain during intercourse, but there are other

causes such as endometriosis and dyspareunia. Additionally, new moms are especially prone to pain due to hormonal changes during and after pregnancy, and while breastfeeding. They often feel tight muscles or dryness—which can cause small micro-tears in the sensitive vaginal tissue.

HOW CAN YOU TREAT THE PAIN?

Although intercourse pain might resolve itself over time, [Maze Women's Sexual Health](#) suggests that women who are suffering seek an evaluation in order to discover and treat whatever condition is causing it.

If you've just had a baby, use birth control, or have reached menopause, it's important to first check your hormone levels via an easy blood test. If it's a medication issue, altering your prescription could be the answer. If your hormone levels are naturally decreasing, hormone therapy (which could be as easy as a cream or a patch) can be helpful and safe.

[Maze Women's Sexual Health](#) also recommends that women get a pelvic exam to rule out vaginismus or vulvodynia. (If you think you might have vaginismus, [take Maze's Vaginismus Quiz](#) to better understand your symptoms.) For

vaginismus, vaginal dilators can help progressively stretch the muscles to eventually allow for comfortable penetration. Other treatments may include hormone therapy, pelvic floor physical therapy, and counseling. Also your doctor might prescribe a [lubricant](#) to make intercourse easier. [Vulvodynia](#), which often occurs in adolescents too, can be cured with hormonal creams, medication changes, vaginal dilation, pelvic floor physical therapy, muscle relaxant suppositories, treatment for underlying infections, vulvar hygiene changes, vaginal injections under anesthesia, and surgery. The treatment will depend on the underlying cause so women and girls should opt for a thorough evaluation.

It's important to find a healthcare provider that is skilled, knowledgeable, and equipped to treat these conditions. Painful sex is not just in your head or something that will pass. In fact, even if the pain is mild, it often leads to distraction and loss of pleasure—and can cause a vicious cycle of fear and anxiety that all women should avoid.

For more information and a free 10-minute phone consultation, [contact Maze Women's Sexual Health](#).



Are Hormones to Blame?

Hormones are some of our body's biggest players. They influence mood, appetite, sleep patterns, memory, and mental health—and they greatly impact women's sexual functioning and libido. For optimum sexual health, it is crucial that women have the right amounts of the right kinds of hormones—estrogen, testosterone and DHEA. [Maze Women's Sexual Health](#) has found a clear link between low hormone levels and a woman's ability to become aroused (as well as the quality of her orgasms.) Women with a hormone imbalance may not be able to resolve these issues without hormone therapy.

HOW DO HORMONES AFFECT A WOMAN'S HEALTH?

Testosterone is a male sex hormone, or androgen, produced in small amounts in a woman's ovaries. Combined with estrogen, it helps with the growth, maintenance, and repair of a woman's reproductive tissues, bone mass, and human behaviors. Some of the symptoms associated with low testosterone in women include decreased sexual desire and satisfaction, as well as a depressed mood.

Estrogen is produced in the ovaries, adrenal glands and fat tissues. As a woman ages, however, she starts to produce less estrogen and this can have a severe impact on memory, metabolism, sexual function, temperature regulation, and mood.

DHEA is a precursor hormone that is produced in the adrenal gland. It helps produce other hormones, including testosterone and estrogen. Natural DHEA levels peak in early adulthood and then slowly fall with age. For women who are suffering postpartum or menopausal symptoms, low libido, dry skin, or memory loss, supplemental DHEA might offer relief.

It's crucial that women have their hormones evaluated—especially if they are having sexual or reproductive issues. A simple blood test by [Maze Women's Sexual Health](#) can accurately interpret hormone levels and help determine the appropriate therapy.

CAN HORMONE THERAPY HELP?

Hormone therapy generally refers to supplementing the body's natural hormones with bio-identical hormones, which are molecularly the same as the natural ones but are man-made. Many bioidentical medications are FDA approved products and available at a general pharmacy.

Estrogen therapy, usually referred to as [Hormone Replacement Therapy](#) (HRT) is the most effective treatment for women suffering from severe menopausal symptoms. The treatment can be local (used only in the vaginal area) or it can be taken orally to affect the entire body. The therapy is safe for all women unless they have problems with vaginal bleeding, certain kinds of cancers, have had a stroke or heart attack, blood clots, a bleeding disorder or liver disease.

For years research has supported the fact

that testosterone replacement therapy in men significantly impacts libido, bone density, energy levels, and mood, so practitioners experimented with small amounts of [testosterone replacement](#) in women and began to see significant and sometimes dramatic outcomes. [Maze Women's Sexual Health](#) has seen thousands of patients with low libido benefit from testosterone. The bioidentical testosterone products come in gel or [pellet form](#). The gel is applied topically to the thigh and the pellet is inserted subcutaneously into the buttocks. Because using testosterone on women is fairly new, there is not a great deal of information on long-term effects but there are no conclusive areas of concern in its use either. When mild short term side effects do surface, they are addressed with proper monitoring of the typically low dosage.

[Maze Women's Sexual Health](#) has done extensive research about the role hormones play in women's sexual reactions and behavior. A low libido or menopausal symptoms are likely the result of hormonal imbalances, which can be corrected with simple forms of therapy—so that you can get on with enjoying your life.

For more information and a free 10-minute phone consultation, [contact Maze Women's Sexual Health](#).



Getting in the Mood

Do you want to know the trick for keeping a long-term sexual relationship interesting? Give it some attention. The more time spent thinking about what would spice up your sex life, the more likely it is that you will find a way to do so. That's why [Maze Women's Sexual Health](#), which understands the importance of a healthy sex life for parents, came up with some ideas for you to, well—just think about it.

1. **Read erotica**—either individually or alone. Not only can erotica get you turned on, it can also offer some new ideas and fantasies to share

(or not) with your partner. Erotica often helps women become more [sexually aroused](#) before diving right into sex.

2. **Role play** can be as simple as putting up a “fight” when you both know darn well that you are in the mood, or as complex as donning elaborate costumes and rituals. Either way, becoming someone else can break down some inhibitions that might be preventing you from getting into the spirit.
3. **Take a shower or a bath together**—it can go a long way. Being naked together, even in the most mundane of situations, might inspire feelings and arousal in one another.
4. **Use new products and toys** to act out a sexual fantasy—or bring your vibrator to bed. If you’re still looking for the right match, Maze’s free guide to their [top vibrator picks](#) can help you find the right one.
5. We’re all a little tense right now so **giving or receiving a massage** can be a wonderful way to reduce tension and get in the mood. (Our libidos tend to take a nose-dive when we’re stressed.) Lower the lights, put on some soothing music, and light a few candles—or just set whatever scene is sexy for you. Add some

coconut or massage oil—but be very careful if using latex because oils can break it down.

6. **Lube** can help with dryness or pain—and it can make things more fun. [Maze’s free guide to lubricants](#) can help you choose the right one for you.
7. Even if you’re constantly in the same space as your partner, **sexting** throughout the day can help build anticipation and desire. Share some of the things you want to do with your partner, or air some of your fantasies without the pressure of staring your partner in the face while you do it.
8. While many people think of **sexy lingerie** as something that turns on your partner, it can also help *you* to get in the mood.

If thinking about all this makes you a bit uncomfortable, that’s a good thing! A little bit of squirming is good for your sex life. And remember: It’s not *what* you try, but the fact that you try at all.

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Maze advocates diagnosis of and treatment for the physical causes of female sexual dysfunction, as well as any underlying psychological influences, by integrating education and psychological counseling with medical techniques specifically to help you achieve a full and satisfying sex life.

Learn more at mazewomenshealth.com
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