

# Not tonight, darling!

A difference in libido is a reality of many relationships and can cause great conflict. Grace Abelola, who has always wanted less sex than her husband, went in search of a solution

**M**y husband has always been the 'high-libido' partner in our relationship. Back in the chandelier-swinging early days, when I was up for it every night, he was still raring to go in the mornings.

Now, 10 years married, I love him as much as ever, but our sex life has dwindled, along with my desire. These days, we make love about once a month – and that is with prompting. While I know he is no longer raring for sex on a daily basis, I also know that he is not completely happy with the situation, and neither am I. But what can we do about it?

A mismatch in libidos is a fact of life in many relationships, but it is also a prime source of unhappiness and cause of divorce. One partner is unsatisfied, the other feels under pressure – it's a recipe for resentment. I want to find a better way to deal with it. I am hoping that Mike Lousada, a sex counsellor and psychotherapist, may be able to help.

## Duty versus desire

Lousada starts off by reassuring me that our situation is far from unusual. 'Some would argue that there is always a high-desire partner and a low-desire partner – there's always an imbalance,' he tells me. 'And the point is that neither one is better than the other – no position is right or wrong. But the person who is the low-desire partner generally controls the supply of sex in the relationship.'

The question, Lousada says, is about 'what kind of sex you want to have'. We talk about my dwindling interest in sex. He says he sees many women in my situation, who have lost their libido within a long-term relationship, and that, when they discuss their sex lives, they say it is all a bit mechanical – the men just want to get on with it. But that is not the case with us – my husband is the one who wants to linger and spend time, I'm the one who is often rushing things along.

Letting go is about vulnerability and trust, Lousada says. 'Very often people

who want to rush are afraid of intimacy. Foreplay is where all our vulnerability comes in.'

We talk about my childhood, which set the blueprint for my experience of love. My father was fairly reliable but emotionally distant, while my mother's volatile personality meant her needs came first. Lousada points to the fact that I was emotionally self-reliant. 'You had an experience where love is conditional – you got love if you were a good girl – which means you can't trust love because it is bought,' he says.

## Respecting each other's needs

Lousada takes me through an exercise from one of his courses, Know Your Sexual Self. We draw a diagram of an onion and its layers, and use it to unpeel motivations for sex, and the needs that underpin these. He divides motivations into two types – 'golden' and 'shadow'. A golden motivation would be: I want to be connected; I want to feel loved. A shadow >>>



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>>> motivation, on the other hand, comes from a place of fear: it is my duty; if I don't, my partner will get his needs met elsewhere. 'But, underneath these shadow motivations, there is still a core quality,' says Lousada. 'I better have sex because otherwise he'll leave me' is a shadow motivation coming from a needy place but, if that need were to be fulfilled, the core quality would be a feeling of safety and security.

'The problem is that the strategy we are using to achieve that – sex – is not necessarily a healthy one. It is not that the need is wrong – safety and security are beautiful, and the need is natural and human – but it is better to try to meet it in another way.'

I realise that, of course, Lousada is right. At some level, unconsciously, I see love as a transaction, and sex as a currency. I feel responsible for meeting my husband's needs, fearing that otherwise he will leave me or have an affair but, at the same time, I know this is impossible while respecting my own needs. And so – inertia.

## Keeping it real

So where do we go from here? I need to trust my husband and tell him what is going on, Lousada says. 'It is about authentic communication. You have a choice – either you can close it down, or you can face it – it's uncomfortable but what if you stay with it?'

'Ultimately all sexual issues are intimacy issues around the questions: can I really let you see me? Can I just lay myself bare? The more you can stay at that edge of feeling that vulnerability – feeling it in yourself and feeling it with your partner – the more you'll be able to work through that. It's like a big bowl of spaghetti – tease out one strand at a time and go, that's that bit and this is this bit,' Lousada explains.

And so I try. My husband was very interested when I said I was going to see Lousada. I think he liked that I

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wanted things to be different. Now I talk to him about what has come up and, immediately, it feels as if a wall has come down. We talk frankly and he tells me how much he has missed, not only sex, but also cuddling, touch, feeling wanted and desired. I tell him that I still very much desire him.

As the conversations continue, I realise that this whole mission was part of a bigger change for me, about a desire for greater authenticity and satisfaction in my whole life. I want our lovemaking to be heartfelt and never perfunctory. I never want to

have 'duty sex' again. This feels almost risqué to say but, for my husband, it is welcome to hear – of course he wants the same thing and this shapes our sex life going forward.

Six months on, and the reality is that we are having only a little more sex than before, but the quality is transformed. I have sex only when I really want it, but immerse myself fully in the experience, and we are playing again – it is lovely. In between, I want to please my husband and meet his needs, and I enjoy finding different ways to do so.

Any resentment has been replaced with heartfelt goodwill. I recently read that for many higher-libido people in relationships, this is the core issue – it is the endless rejection that pushes them away, not the lack of sex. I hope we have found a way past it – a true compromise where both our needs are met.

*Find out more about Mike Lousada's courses at [mikelousada.com](http://mikelousada.com)*

## “I didn't feel desired by him”

*Nadia Smyth, 30, found the answer to a satisfying sex life was being open with her partner*

I met Sam in my late 20s and knew he was special. But, a couple of months into our relationship, the amount of sex we were having dwindled. I loved him, but I really wanted sex four to five times a week. I didn't feel desired by him. So what was the solution?

Discussing it with a friend, I realised then that, despite my dissatisfaction, I was rarely the one who initiated sex. So,

feeling nervous, I tried to be sexy. But all I got was a strange look from Sam, who was clearly wondering why I had started draping myself all over him.

Then I thought about what he does to initiate sex – he has a caring, unselfish approach, purely focused on the other person. So I thought about what turned Sam on, instead of just thinking about what I like. And, rather than prancing

around expecting him to read my mind, I showed him through touch and words how much I wanted him.

I felt powerless before but, now I know I can make the first move, too, there is more balance. I hadn't considered that a clear, uncomplicated statement of my desire for him might boost Sam's confidence. We are having sex a bit more often now and I feel better about it.