Let's talk about SEX...

What's going on with your libido?

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We can talk about sex, but with increased rates of low libido, are people actually “doing it”? 
Research indicates that 43 percent of women report problems with sexual performance or enjoyment. What may be more surprising is that approximately 31 percent of men are avoiding extra-curricular activities in the bedroom due to some type of sexual dysfunction.

**LET'S TALK ABOUT ... STRESS**

Although there are a number of factors involved in sexual dysfunction (see sidebar), stress seems to be the most pervasive issue affecting men, regardless of age or health status.

It seems the more stress present, the more significant the sexual problems are. The internal (or emotional) stress that we experience every day interferes with sex drive by inhibiting healthy testosterone levels in men.

But research has also speculated that stress may impact the body’s ability to build healthy sperm and maintain fertility levels, all of which are fundamental in a healthy sexual response.

So what can we do to regulate the stress response and support testosterone levels as much as possible?

**LET'S TALK ABOUT ... HANGING OUT**

There is compelling evidence that men need a periodic boys’ night out to help manage mental and emotional turmoil in stressful situations.

Research has indicated that the presence of social support from a friend is fundamental in decreasing the intensity of a taxing situation on the male stress response. Although historically women have been more likely to seek out social support in stressful situations, it’s evident that men too should be utilizing this beneficial tool to help promote optimal physical health and vitality.

**LET'S TALK ABOUT ... TRIMMING THE FAT**

We all know that exercise is essential to lower stress levels, increase energy production, build lean muscle mass, and decrease fat percentage. But studies also indicate that short, moderate exercise programs increase serum (blood) testosterone levels in men, which may lead to an increase in sexual desire.

Exercise also aids in maintaining a leaner abdominal region while research has determined that waist measurement may be an influential factor in maintaining healthy testosterone levels in men.

In a study conducted on 1,822 healthy men, several risk factors for low testosterone levels were examined with results indicating that increased waist circumference was a major contributor to lowered male hormone levels.

Health Canada’s Physical Activity Guide to Healthy Active Living recommends 30 to 60 minutes of exercise per day (or almost every day) to maximize exercise benefits, but any amount of exercise is better than none.

**Zinc-containing foods**

Foods high in zinc should be consumed daily.

- oysters
- red meat
- poultry
- beans
- nuts
- shellfish
- whole grains
- dairy products

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qualities; research indicates there may be some truth to this sexual legend.

Studies indicate that low zinc levels may be a contributor to sexual dysfunction in men, and supplementation has been shown to improve sperm count, sperm mobility, production of normal sperm, and acid phosphate activity.

LET'S TALK ABOUT ... HERBAL HELPERS
There are many herdals known for their positive effect on libido and testosterone levels.

Tribulus terrestris
Tribulus is a herb that has been used for decades in the treatment of male sexual dysfunction. Its reported benefits include increased testosterone levels, sperm production, and enhanced libido.

Animal studies indicate tribulus may stimulate libido by increasing the androgen hormone levels of testosterone, DHEA (dehydroepiandrosterone, an endogenous hormone secreted by the adrenal gland), and DHT (dihydrotestosterone, an active metabolite of testosterone).

Ginsein
Ginsein, both the Asian and the American forms, is a herb also well known for enhancing male libido. Research has suggested that its effects may be related to the action of the active component ginsenoside on the central nervous system and male reproductive tissue.

Animal studies have indicated that ginsein may help stimulate an erection by encouraging the release of nitric oxide, a component that causes vasodilatation (sending blood into the blood vessels) in the penis. Research has also suggested that American ginsein affects the central nervous system and increases hormone production while enhancing libido.

Recommended dosages for the herbal supplements vary depending on the nature and extent of the sexual dysfunction. For specific concerns related to libido, talk to your health care practitioner.

Chantelle Drobot, ND, owns and practises out of the Integrative Health Centre in Calgary. Her clinical focus includes stress-related illnesses and cardiovascular disease.