



O-MY!

If your sex life leaves, well, something to be desired, you're not alone. But it doesn't have to be that way.

TEXT KAREN ROBOCK

“There's just such a disparity when it comes to enjoyable sex in heterosexual couples,” says Jordin Wiggins, a sexologist and naturopathic doctor at Health Over All Clinic in Niagara, Ont. And it's affecting so many areas of women's lives outside of the bedroom, too, including their relationships and mental health. “I could cry talking to women about this,” says Wiggins. “They think they're broken, but there's nothing wrong with them—there is something wrong with what we're taught about sex, though.”

Mind the gap

Depending on the research you read, approximately 75 to 85 percent of men always orgasm during sex, compared to only 30 to 35 percent of women. “I work with women of all ages and many of them tell me that they've never orgasmed with their partner—ever—or they have difficulty orgasming,” says Wiggins. “They're almost resigned to it as part of being in a relationship, that pleasurable sex is just for men.”

That imbalance only seems to exist between

straight women and men—women who are having sex with other women report experiencing significantly more pleasure. And women even note that they have more orgasms when alone than when they're with a male partner. (In one study, 39 percent of women said they always orgasm during masturbation while a mere 6 percent said they do with a husband or boyfriend.) This all tells us one very positive thing: More enjoyable sex is possible, even if it seems unattainable.

With so many women having so much disappoint-

ing sex, it's no wonder that there's such an abundance of low libido and sexual dysfunction, says Wiggins. “The term ‘sex drive’ is a misnomer,” says Wiggins. That's because sexual pleasure is not actually a drive like hunger or thirst. Instead, people experience sexual desire based on a rewards system, where the more good sex they have, the more good sex they want. “If women consistently have sex that doesn't meet their needs, then it's not a reward, and as a result they're not hard-wired to want to do it again,” she says.

Sexual wellness

Understanding the orgasm gap and addressing it is essential to help women achieve more satisfying sex lives. That's very important, yes, but our sex life isn't just about sex. “Research shows that having a satisfying sex life is related to overall life satisfaction,” says Dr. Laurie Mintz, a licensed psychologist sex therapist and author of *Becoming Cliterate*. Good sex is tied to many facets of physical health, from higher immune function to stress reduction. It's also linked to better self-esteem, better sleep habits and better relationships. “And this is not just for young, cisgender women,” says Dr. Mintz. It's true for people of all ages and preferences. “I've had many people tell me that by becoming more empowered in the bedroom, they became more empowered in other areas of their life as well.”

We could all use some sex ed

Experts say a main source of our pleasure problem is miseducation. To begin with, we don't know nearly enough about our own bodies. According to a 2019 survey conducted in the United Kingdom by YouGov, an international analytics and research data group, both genders are

guilty of misnaming female anatomy. In fact, half of those studied could not correctly identify the urethra, labia or vagina on a diagram—never mind their respective functions.

It's actually a pretty big deal that most women call their entire genital area a vagina, says Dr. Mintz. It's biologically inaccurate (the vagina is only the passageway to the uterus), but it also does us a great disservice between the sheets. “We call our entire genitals by the name of the area used for male penetration and male sexual pleasure, linguistically erasing our pleasure centre,” she says. “We should stop and think about that.”

“About 80 percent of women don't orgasm from penetrative sex alone,” says Éva Goicochea, the founder of the new-to-Canada modern sexual wellness brand Maude. The vast majority of women require clitoral stimulation. (And here's a fun fact: The clitoris is special in that it's the only organ of the human body, male or female, that's sole purpose is pleasure.) “Women have really been ignored when it comes to our sexual health and pleasure, so that has been our goal [with Maude]: to open the conversation and have products you can bring into the partnership without it feeling uncomfortable,” says Goicochea.

SEX SELF-CARE

There's no quick fix for less-than-optimal sex, but these five tips from Jordin Wiggins, a sexologist and naturopathic doctor at Health Over All Clinic in Niagara, Ont., are a great place to start to get tangled in your sheets more often.

- 1 Take off the time pressure.** It can take women upwards of 30 minutes to reach orgasm, while most men only need eight. If quickies aren't doing it for you, having lots of uninterrupted time with your partner could be key.
- 2 Talk to your partner about sex when you're not having sex.** Starting a conversation when you're both naked and vulnerable might not be productive. Find a quiet time when you're not being intimate to talk about your needs, likes and desires.
- 3 Understand that all orgasms are clitoral orgasms.** “I feel I need to myth-bust this idea of there being a hierarchy of orgasms where penetrative orgasms are somehow better than clitoral orgasms,” says Wiggins. “It all comes from the same organ, even when it's being stimulated internally.”
- 4 Embrace “outercourse.”** Foreplay, like cuddling, kissing and touching are essential for many women to reach orgasm. “Think of it this way: Women are like a pot that needs to come to a boil; men are like a light switch,” she says.
- 5 Try mutual masturbation.** It's a no-pressure way to show your partner what kinds of touch you like. Here's a chance to introduce your partner to your vibrator, if you have one but have only used it solo.



We still feel pressure to perform. It's no wonder that some 70 percent of women have faked an orgasm. "We still overvalue penetrative sex and put too much emphasis on the enjoyment men receive," says Dr. Mintz.

It's time to rewrite the sex script

For the past few years there have been rumblings of a pleasure revolution. While sleek and nonintimidating devices, billboard ads for cannabis products designed to enhance female orgasm and Daphne's masturbation scene (which was purposefully written from the female perspective) on the rompy Netflix hit *Bridgerton* may feel ground-breaking, most women still are not feeling the earth shake on a regular basis.

There are a lot of hurdles for women to overcome, from misinformation about our bodies to gender ste-

reotypes to our partners' misconceptions about the basics of female pleasure. And women still feel that pressure to perform. No wonder some 70 percent of us have faked an orgasm. "We still overvalue penetrative sex and put too much emphasis on the enjoyment men receive," says Dr. Mintz. Instead, we should be including things that bring *us* erotic pleasure, from snuggling and sexting to flirting and foreplay.

Women need to let go of shame and inhibitions, embrace their bodies for what they are and prioritize their needs, however that looks. "We all deserve pleasurable sex," says Wiggins.

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