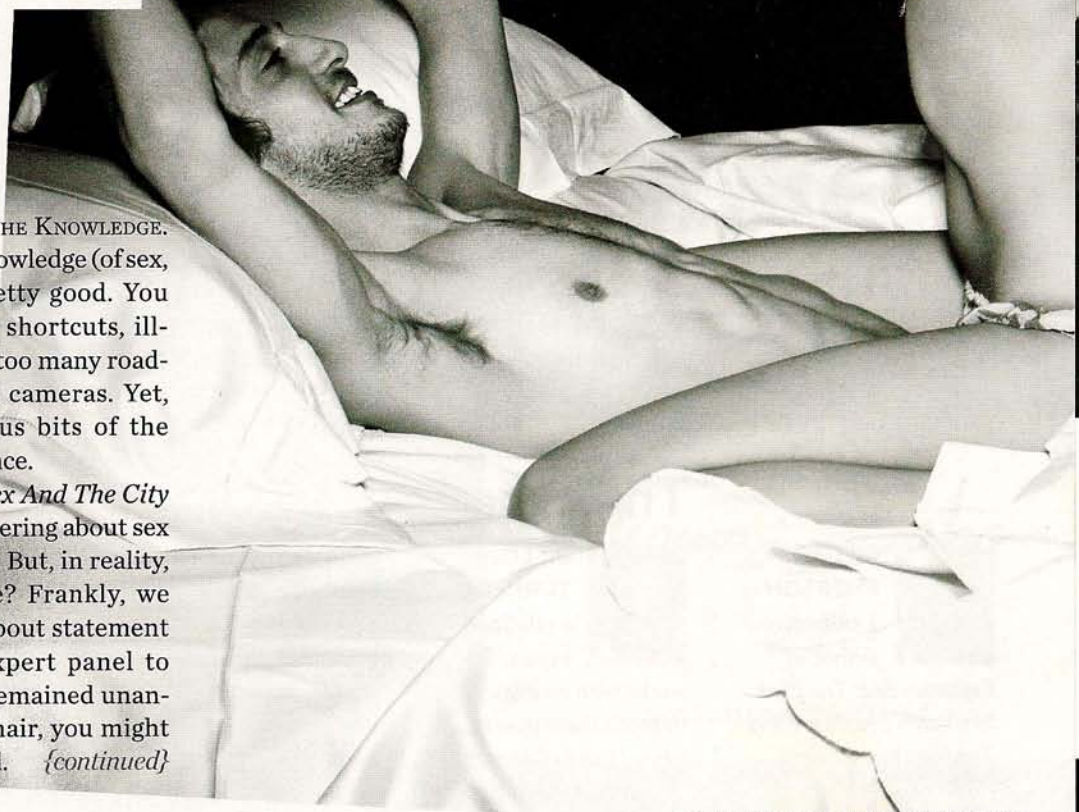


# The Ups & Downs Of Your Libido... ...& Other Sex Questions Answered

**B**LACK CAB DRIVERS DO THE KNOWLEDGE. And, by now, your Knowledge (of sex, that is) must be pretty good. You know all the sexual shortcuts, ill-advised streets with too many road-bumps and godforsaken speed cameras. Yet, there are still some mysterious bits of the map, despite decades of sexperience.

But who to ask? Repeats of *Sex And The City* show girlfriends constantly chattering about sex and relationships over cocktails. But, in reality, we don't really do this, do we? Frankly, we dedicate more time to talking about statement wallpaper. So, we asked an expert panel to reveal the questions that have remained unanswered - until now. Pull up a chair, you might learn something. We certainly did. *{continued}*





**1** Why does my libido fluctuate? Some weeks I can't get enough and other weeks I don't want sex at all. How can I make it more consistent?

'Peaks and troughs are a hormonal inevitability,' says relationship expert Dr Lisa Turner. 'Just before your period and when you're ovulating, your sex drive soars.' But it's also a symptom of how the rest of your life is going, says sexual psychotherapist Manjit Ubhi. 'Stress puts a leash on your libido. If you feel undermined in other parts of your life, it can manifest itself in the bedroom. Attend to any gripes in your relationship, as there's nothing like simmering resentment to kill lust.' And, she adds, women take 20 minutes longer to get aroused than men. 'Scientists studied the brain during female masturbation, and the areas that became active also sparked when women merely *thought* about sex. So, a good habit is to think yourself turned on before you're near each other.' Don't wait until you're in bed, says sexpert Richard Emerson. 'Teenage petting on the sofa can work wonders. You'll be surprised how quickly your libido revives.' Lying in bed playing the 'sex versus half an hour more sleep' game will only create bad feeling.

**2** When we met we had sex four to five times a week. A year on and it's just once or twice. What's average?

At the start of a relationship, your brain is on a similar high to that experienced by drug addicts, says Ubhi. 'But that intensity can only be sustained for a short period. It's impossible to function otherwise.' Once or twice a week is the national average, says Turner. 'And remember that quantity does not necessarily denote quality. That seemingly loved-up couple you know may well

**'Remember that quantity does not denote quality'**

be at it every single night, but it could be awful sex – whereas your bi-weekly session is spectacular. It's entirely individual to you as a couple. If you're

both happy with the amount of sex you're having, forget about averages.' Besides, people lie. Halve the number of times they say they have sex – and that may be closer to the truth.

**3** I think about other people while I'm having sex with my partner. Does that mean I'm bored with him?

You would definitely be given a written warning for the things you've done to that male colleague in your mind. But it's likely every other woman in your workplace has done the dirty with him too. Research has found that women are actually more prone to commit

mental adultery than men – 80 per cent of women fantasise about 'someone they know', while 75 per cent of men simply muse on a ticker-tape of pornographic images. So, while he is thinking about random female bodies, you're building a filmic plot in your head with the hot guy from the train. 'It's completely normal and no sign your relationship is perishing,' says Ubhi. 'The brain is a goal-seeking computer that thrives on variety. If looking at the same face is not getting you there, it will hunt around for other methods to get to your goal.'

**4** Since having kids, my vagina is so different. Can surgery restore it or can I get tighter down there in a more natural way?

The thought of it may make us flinch, but vaginal surgery is one of the fastest-growing cosmetic procedures in the UK. 'It's an extremely painful and drastic procedure,' says Dr Turner. 'Women see images of tight, perfect vaginas in porn films and think that's what men want, but I have worked with countless men who say this isn't the case. And there are many other options. Instead of focusing on the aesthetic, work on tightening the pelvic muscles. The most effective method is to use a small exercise aid such as a jade egg (at manawa.co.uk). You start with a large egg, practise squeezing it, and then gradually move down to a smaller egg. This will not only flex your vaginal and urethral muscles, it will also strengthen the top of your pubic bone and help to lubricate your vagina.' There are also machines that electronically stimulate your vagina, says Ubhi. Try the Athena Pelvic Muscle Trainer (at pelvic-toners.co.uk). So we just lie back and it does the work for us? Sounds good to us. *{continued}*

**The experts**



**RICHARD EMERSON** is a sexpert and author of

*Explosive Sex: The Best Sex You'll Ever Have and The New Kama Sutra*



**DR LISA TURNER** is a relationship expert. She

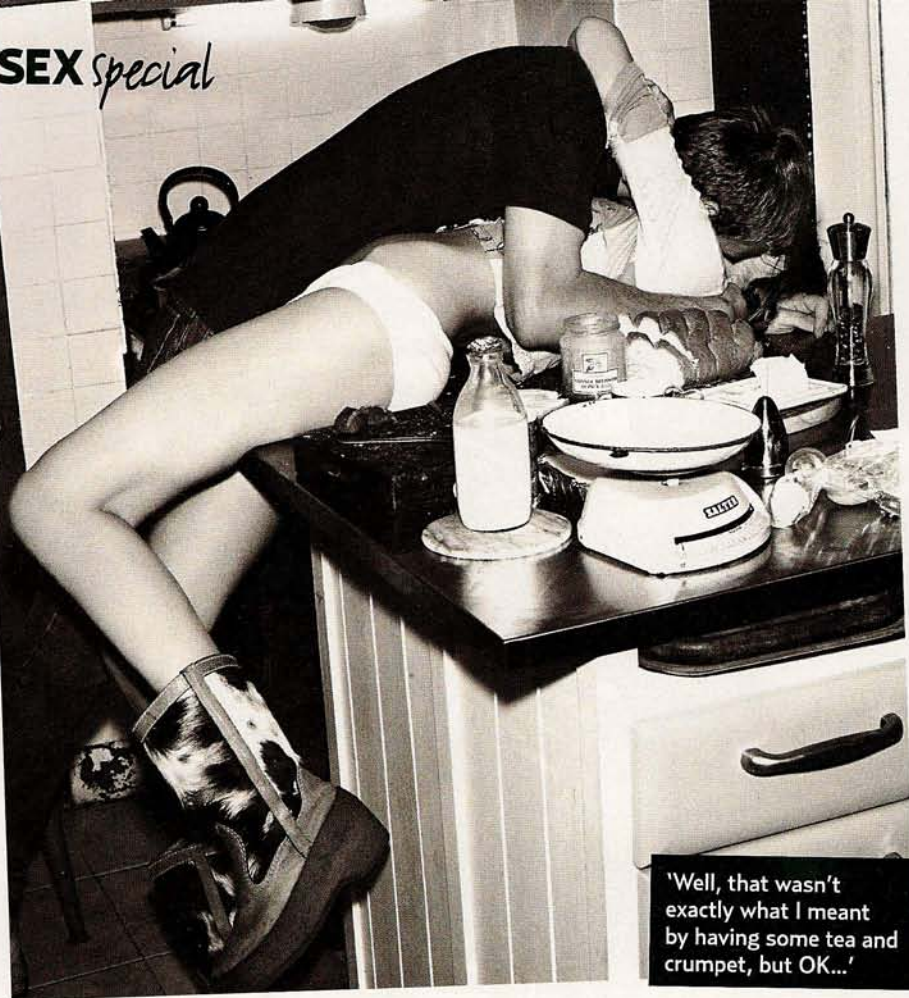
works with couples to teach them how to harness sexual energy



**MANJIT UBHI** is an accredited psychotherapist who counsels

couples about the psychological issues surrounding sex





'Well, that wasn't exactly what I meant by having some tea and crumpet, but OK...'

## 5 What can I do to improve the orgasms I have by myself?

Even when you're in a relationship, masturbate as much as possible, advises Ubhi. 'We don't have a finite number of orgasms per week. It's like training for a marathon—the more you run, the more you *can* run. Flex that muscle as much as possible and your body will respond more easily.' Whereas male fantasies are like short stories with a lot of action, women get off on furnishing their fantasies with feature-length-film detail, says Emerson. 'What he says, what you say, what you're wearing, what the bed's like. Deck it out with as much detail as you can and have favourite "mind films" you can return to at any time.' It is also important that you don't tell your partner about them. 'Somehow, saying it out loud shatters the mystique and thrill of it.'

***'Couples who kiss every day are less likely to divorce'***

## 6 We haven't had sex for three months. Does that mean he doesn't lust after me any more?

It's a hard-wired evolutionary fact: married men have lower levels of testosterone than unmarried men. Why? He no longer needs to compete with other men for the prize – you. But don't worry. One in four couples have experienced a barren three-month period at some point. 'Even though it's very common, a lapse in the bedroom can be a good time to take the temperature of the rest of

the relationship,' says Ubhi. 'It may be just down to daily stresses and lack of time, but check there isn't a deeper disharmony. Forget about intercourse for the time being. The first thing I do with clients experiencing this is to impose a two-week penetration ban. It always works. Focus on cherishing and caring for each other. Massages, walks,

cooking meals together. It sounds cheesy, but by taking the time to become intimate again outside the bedroom, you'll find dramatic results inside it by the end of the week.'

## 7 How do I broach the subject that his foreplay has become predictable and monotonous?

'If you're careful and don't make it too glaringly obvious,' says Dr Turner, 'spacing out the positive and negative comments over time is the best way to package constructive criticism about his technique. Never say, "I don't like this." Instead say, "I like this, but let's try X too." End with an overall comment about how great he is as a lover. Even if he knows what you're doing, he'll suspend disbelief, believe me.' Emerson suggests shaking things up with a sexy casino game. 'Write down 11 activities you want to try and number them two to 12. Then roll two dice.' Who knows, you might win a better sex life. Now your only challenge is to think of 11 things you haven't done yet.

## 8 We've stopped kissing, except as a prelude to sex. Does that matter?

'Yes, this absolutely matters,' says Dr Turner. 'A Relate study has shown that couples who kiss every day are less likely to divorce than those who have sex every day.' Kissing is the most intimate thing you can do, explains Ubhi. 'There is a huge number of nerve endings in the lips and, when they're touched, our stress levels have been shown to lower. Rekindle the habit slowly, with small pecks when leaving the house or in public, so it becomes more than a mere preamble to sex.' ■

Want more? Spice up your sex life with these top tips [marieclaire.co.uk/sextips](http://marieclaire.co.uk/sextips)