



Wendy Trainor
communication and healing

Sexual disturbances: “Normal” responses to what is happening in our lives

When people understand that sexual problems are often the result of stresses in their lives they are more likely to seek a solution to their problem rather than live with it – whether these stresses have a biological, psychological or socio-cultural component or a combination of these.

For example, breastfeeding and menopausal women experience similar drops in estrogen levels which cause vaginal discomfort during sexual intercourse and often benefit from the use of estrogen. If your doctor has not asked you about your sexuality at these times, he will certainly be aware of the potential problems and be willing to prescribe the necessary estrogen.

When young men learn to self-pleasure, they often do so quickly so they won't get caught. Older men who aren't in a relationship often follow a similar pattern when they self pleasure. They are learning to ejaculate quickly. It should therefore come as no surprise that these same men become early ejaculators when they are with partners. I would call this a “normal” response. It is possible to learn to be different. A book such as Bernie Zilbergeld's *The New Male Sexuality* is a good resource for men. If this book does not provide a solution, ask your doctor for a referral to a sex therapist.

Men, as they age, can be less assured of achieving an erection every time they have a sexual encounter. Their erections will be less firm and they will need more direct penile stimulation to achieve and maintain an erection. If men can accept these conditions as normal, they are less likely to panic and become anxious. It is the performance anxiety that creates ongoing problems. Men and their partners often experience increased sexual pleasure as they age by slowing down and enjoying the process of pleasuring more.

People often come to me because they are feeling very distant from their partners. When I ask them about their lifestyles, it becomes clear that they are spending very little time together. With both parents working and young children to care for when they get home, couples often have little energy left over for themselves. Fatigue and stress contribute to distance in relationships. Sexual problems are “normal” responses to this distance. The busier we are, the more intentional we have to be about spending time as a couple so we can nurture our relationship and feel comfortable being intimate.

When people are depressed, sex is the first thing to go in the relationship and the last thing to come back. While the depressed person may be on medication to help with the depression, therapy is often necessary to address the relationship issues. Unfortunately, the SSRI medications that can be so helpful for the depression can cause sexual side effects.

What is happening sexually is often a metaphor for what is happening in our relationship. Sexual disturbances are an indication of issues that need to be addressed. If we can view sexual disturbances as a barometer for our relationship, we can stop blaming our partners for the problems we are experiencing and begin addressing them as a couple.

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