

Sex, so necessary for positive health

Sex is a buzzword that defies trendsetting and social mores, staying top of mind and tip of tongue

By Kirsten Alexander

What is it about sex that gets us all aflutter with flaming cheeks and snide giggles? Has it something to do with our innate fear of rejection? Or perhaps the ingrained social idealism that sex should be kept under wraps at all costs, despite the fact that everybody experiences its sensuous pull?

Physicians, philosophers and psychologists insist our bodies know what's good for us. They're adamant that if we just listen carefully to our physiology, we'll be able to fully tune in to wellness. So, let's cut to the bone on this one and acknowledge that we desire sex because our body knows what's good for it. Let's face it, if procreation were the only reason for having sex, we wouldn't be dealing with world over-population issues.

WHOLE MIND

The benefits of a good romp are overwhelming, from helping with hay fever to cancer prevention.¹ But let's first explore what occurs in the brain. In a study outlined in his book, *The Science of Orgasm*, Prof Barry Komisaruk scrutinises women under an MRI scanner to explore what

happens in the brain during an orgasm.² The entire brain lights up like a firework display, indicating that an orgasm is a whole brain experience.

It's become common knowledge that sex is a stress beater;

conversely, stress can be a sex defeater and if you're finding it difficult to step up in the bedroom, try a little relaxation. The loving touch of your partner in the form of a massage, a foot tickle, or just some good old-fashioned nurturing with your favourite tune softly playing in the background is a great start to overcoming stress-induced bed fright.

A general feeling of well-being goes a long way to reducing stress levels, increasing endorphins and health. The ability to cope with daily stressors is much increased in people who regularly engage in sexual intimacy or at least live with someone else, compared with those who are physically isolated.³

The up-and-down effect of sexual intimacy is found again in self-esteem. People with high self-esteem are more open to sexual encounters, and people who have regular sex find their self-esteem rising. If your partner's desire wanes, it may just be that a little bit of ego boosting is required to coax them back under the covers. After sexual activity, men and women's oxytocin levels are in harmony, inducing the desire for a good cuddle. Of course, this evokes all sorts of warm and fuzzy feelings, enhancing self-esteem, comfort and security.

The benefits of a good romp are overwhelming, from cures for hay fever to cancer prevention

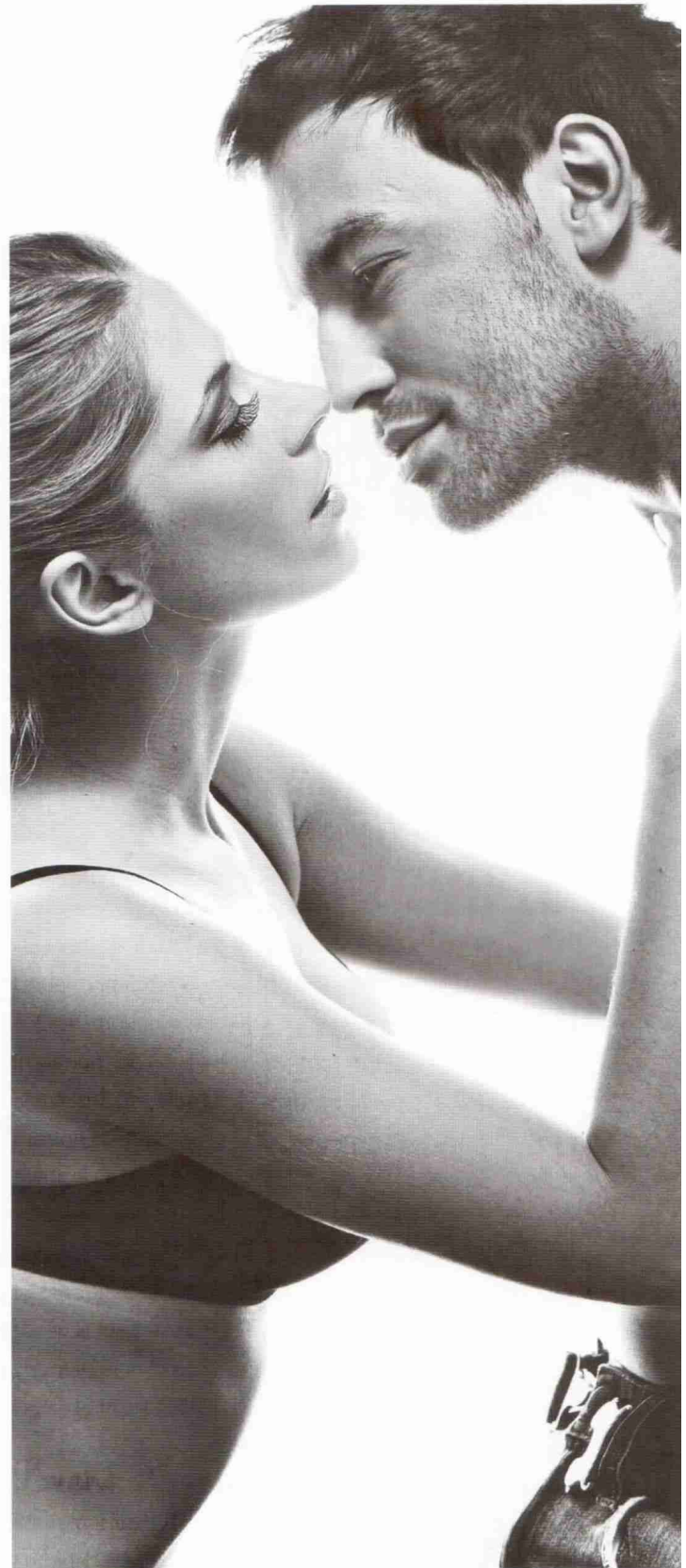
SEXUAL HEALING

Top-selling 1960s Motown crooner Marvin Gaye sings about “sexual healing”, but his lyrics just highlight the desire aspect, as opposed to the very real health benefits. Contrary to many jokes on the subject, a headache doesn’t constitute a good enough, “not tonight dear” excuse. In fact, a sore head is a great reason to have sex because increased levels of oxytocin release endorphins, turning on pain-relieving mechanisms – not just for headaches, but cramps and overall body pains, too. In a study published in *Experimental Biology and Medicine*, volunteers who inhaled oxytocin vapour and then had their fingers pricked, felt less than half the pain than before inhalation.⁴

As for hay fever, well, the hormone prolactin (a peptide hormone primarily associated with lactation wherein oxytocin production is stimulated by infant suckling) surges in the afterglow, and this fires new neurons into the brain’s olfactory bulb (the part of the brain that controls smell), giving you a heightened sense of smell, opening up airways and even activating tastebuds.⁵ Flu and the common cold are also kept at bay – a study at Wilkes University Pennsylvania showed higher levels of the antibody immunoglobulin A (IgA) in groups who reported having frequent (once or twice weekly) sexual intercourse.⁶

A good cardio workout is almost always recommended to enhance health. People expend different amounts of energy during sex, and although levels of movement are individualised, the heart-pumping, spine tingling arousal stage certainly has cardio benefits, increasing bloodflow and providing a healthy dose of oxygen to the brain and bloodstream, stimulating detoxification.

In men, studies have shown that ejaculating more than five times a week can reduce their risk of prostate cancer by as much as a third.⁷ A regular pelvic floor muscle squeeze assists in bladder control, specifically after giving birth and towards the latter years of life. Dr Arnold Kegel highlighted the need for contracting and relaxing the pelvic floor muscles to aid women in childbirth, reduce urinary incontinence and increase the size and intensity of erections, as well as reduce premature ejaculatory occurrences in men.^{8,9}



HOR-MOAN-AL

Testosterone, progesterone and estrogen imbalances have been linked to age-related conditions such as stroke, bone fracture, coronary artery disease, type II diabetes, cancer and even sleep apnoea (a disorder characterised by abnormal pauses in breathing while sleeping), all of which can have an adverse affect on your sex life.¹⁰

With each orgasm reached, the hormone DHEA, linked to long life, increases as a response to sexual excitement and orgasm. DHEA also boosts the immune system, repairs tissue, improves mental alertness and keeps skin healthy.¹¹

Merely checking levels of these hormones isn't enough. It's imperative to look at the sex hormone-binding globulin (SHBG). Primarily produced in the liver, SHBG is also synthesised through the uterus, testes, brain and placenta and transports testosterone and estrogen throughout the body. SHBG levels steadily increase as you age, but sex hormones decrease, which deactivates testosterone in men and estrogen in women, so supplementing with a phytochemical from a nettle plant (known as 3,4-divanillyl-tetrahydrofuran) effectively counteracts this age-related imbalance.¹²

DO THE FANDANGO

It's all very well to wax lyrical about the benefits of sex, but if your libido leaves little to be desired, what's the first step in getting back on top?

A good, wholesome diet and specific supplementation can make all the difference. Marrena Lindberg, author of *The Orgasmic Diet: A Revolutionary Plan to Lift Your Libido and Bring You to Orgasm*, studied the effects of nutrients and exercise on the ability to reach orgasm and states that a healthy balanced diet sets the table for sexual satisfaction, but to get to the next level, a bit more work is required.

Supplementing with magnesium and zinc to increase the levels of testosterone in your blood assists in increasing

desire. A good multivitamin with an extra dose of vitamin C, a mega dose of omega-3 fatty acids and taking the supplements listed in the protocol can produce explosive results. Naturally, not smoking, cutting back on caffeine and alcohol, and exercise.

Such a regime may not immediately set you off on a frisky jaunt, but it will certainly go a long way towards increasing overall wellness and reducing the effects of stress on your body – this will boost your levels of energy, self-esteem and then libido.

So, whip up a healthy dose of nutrients and supplements, gather together in a rush of cardio-pumping exercise and make a hearty dash for the bedroom. **HI**

LIBIDO-ENHANCING PROTOCOL

L-Arginine (1,400mg twice daily)

High potency multivitamin

Zinc (20mg daily)

Magnesium (200mg twice daily)

Omega-3 fatty acids (1,000mg twice daily).

References

- 1 Fagarasan S, Honjo T. Intestinal IgA Synthesis: Regulation of Front-line Body Defenses. *Nat Rev Immunology*. 2003;3(1):63–72
- 2 Komisaruk BR, Beyer-Flores C. *The Science of Orgasm*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, US. 2006
- 3 Marazziti D, Dell'Osso B, et al. A relationship between oxytocin and anxiety of romantic attachment. *Clinical Practice and Epidemiology in Mental Health* 2006;2
- 4 Uryvaev Y. Extremely low doses of oxytocin reduce pain sensitivity in men. *Bulletin of Experimental Biology and Medicine*. Nov 1996;122:487–89
- 5 Bartholomew EF, Martini F, et al. *Essentials of anatomy & physiology*. Pearson/Benjamin Cummings, San Francisco, US. 2007
- 6 Giles GG, Severi G, et al. Sexual factors and prostate cancer. *BJU Int*. Aug 2003;92(3):211–6
- 7 See reference 1
- 8 La Pera G, Nicastro A. A new treatment for premature ejaculation: the rehabilitation of the pelvic floor. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*. 1996; 22(1):22–6
- 9 Hay-Smith J, Dumoulin C. Pelvic floor muscle training versus no treatment, or inactive control treatments, for urinary incontinence in women. *Cochrane database of systematic reviews (Online)*. 2006;1:CD005654
- 10 He H, Yang F, et al. Sex hormone ratio changes in men and postmenopausal women with coronary artery disease. *Menopause*. May-Jun 2007;14(3 Pt 1):385–90
- 11 Enomoto M, Adachi H, et al. Serum Dehydroepiandrosterone Sulfate Levels Predict Longevity in Men: 27-Year Follow-Up Study in a Community-Based Cohort (Tanushimaru Study). *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. 2008;56(6):994–8
- 12 Schöttner M, Spittler G, et al. Lignans interfering with 5 alpha-dihydrotestosterone binding to human sex hormone-binding globulin. *J Nat Prod*. Jan 1998;61(1):119–21