

Steam Up Your Sex Life

SUFFERING FROM A LACK OF HEAT BETWEEN THE SHEETS? BOOSTING YOUR LIBIDO MIGHT BE EASIER THAN YOU THINK.

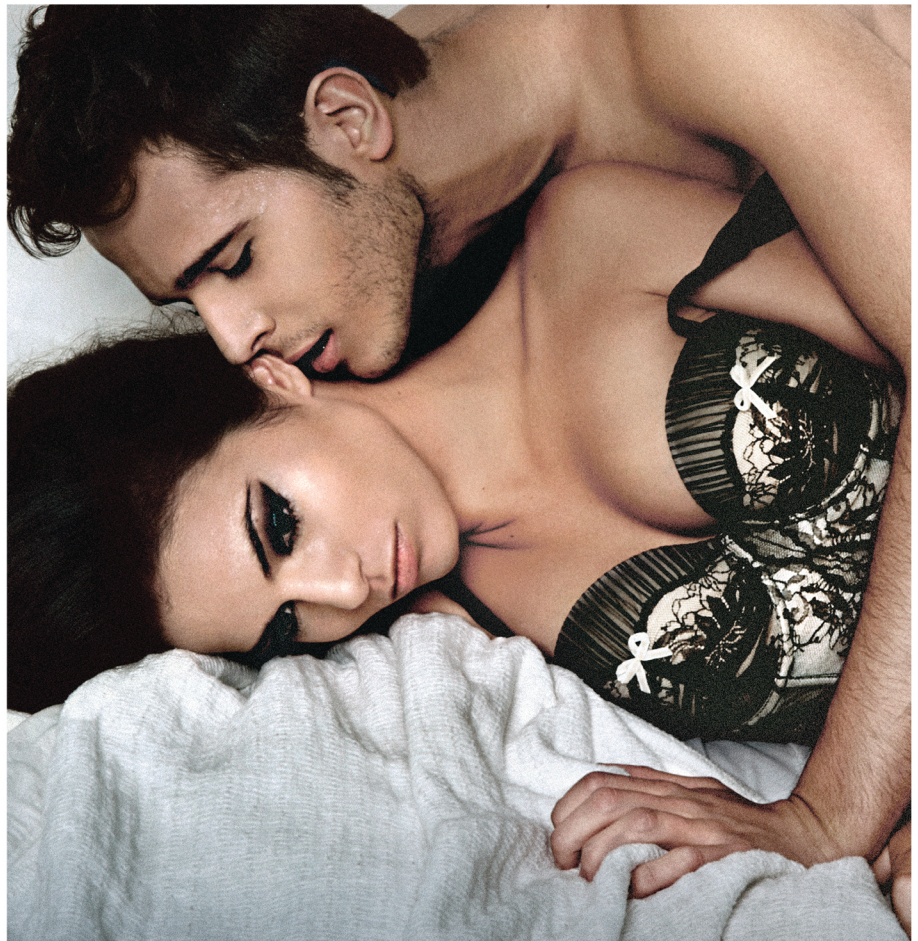
BY DORKYS RAMOS

■ **SEXUAL SATISFACTION PLAYS A MAJOR ROLE IN A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP**, but if your sex drive is straying off course, it may have little to do with the quality of your romance. An estimated 24 to 36 percent of women struggle with low libido, or Hypoactive Sexual Desire Disorder (HSDD), and the reasons are as varied as the women living with this condition.

If you're having trouble getting in the mood, do a body scan for hints on what could be causing your lack of desire. Factors such as work stress, prolonged physical discomforts, mental illnesses like depression, certain medications, or hormonal changes during menopause could each affect your libido. It even rises and falls throughout the month according to your menstrual cycle.

"During the days closer to ovulation and during ovulation, women's libidos tend to spike," said Tanginika Cuascud, a clinical sexologist. "Days before menstruation, women may also experience more sensation in their genitals, causing them to feel sexually aroused. [On the other hand] PMS may negatively affect a woman's libido due to the bothersome symptoms associated with it."

Because treating issues of female sexuality is more complicated than erectile dysfunction in men, it's taken



longer to come up with a "magic pill" for women and there's skepticism as to whether the first FDA-approved drug to treat HSDD, Addyi, actually works.

But a tanking libido doesn't mean a life of sexual frustration. Treating symptoms that cause discomfort during sex like vaginal dryness and addressing

issues like hot flashes, fatigue, or anxiety can improve the situation. "Masturbation is also a great way to maintain a healthy sexual appetite," Cuascud said. "Women who masturbate often are exercising their pelvic floor muscles, maintaining healthy blood flow into the vagina and vulva, and avoiding vaginal dryness and atrophy."

Share the experience with your partner by watching or reading erotica together, engaging in more foreplay, and having an honest discussion about your sex life. Couples counseling or a healthcare professional can help if ongoing low libido is causing conflict in your relationship or if you believe that a physical or mental condition is a possible culprit. "Some physicians prescribe antidepressants and hormone replacement therapy for symptoms that are associated with low sexual desire and menopause," Cuascud said.

Whatever the cause, navigating the natural ebbs and flows in your libido will alleviate some of those frustrations and make sex fun again—the way it was meant to be.

Even better than oysters...

Before you head for the raw bar, know that there's no scientific evidence that certain foods ramp up sex drive. Instead, experts suggest adopting a healthy lifestyle to spark things up. For example, exercising regularly will not only lead to more body confidence and flood your system with feel-good endorphins, but will also improve blood circulation—making you feel more aroused down below—and increase your stamina. So grab your partner for a quick run, then burn extra calories back in the bedroom!