



kort's korner

Are You a High T or a Low T?

JERRY AND LINDA CAME TO ME TO help them with their marital problems. He felt that she had tricked him into marrying her by “pretending” to have a high sex drive, and believed that Linda was now withholding sex in an effort

to punish him for problems in their marriage.

Linda had a different story and said that she herself felt tricked. In the beginning, Jerry had turned her on “beyond belief,” more than ever before in her whole life. But after they married, she felt that he had stopped trying to arouse her and became selfish about his own sexual needs.

This is a common scenario among the heterosexual couples I see in my office—as it also is with gay and lesbian couples. The reality is that partners’ sex drives rarely match. Every couple has some sexual discrepancy, based on their different baseline sex drives. In other words, whatever your sex drive is, that’s normal for you—unless your sexual love map suffered some trauma. Factors like sexual abuse and sexual addiction can trump a person’s normative libido. But otherwise, what’s unique to you is, for you, normal.

But when love is young and fresh and you’re infatuated with your partner, you feel high on internal

chemicals like PEA which increase your libido. So the people with lower sex drives can usually keep up with their partners. For a while, you both feel like you’ve died and gone to heaven, because you’re both getting your needs met. The person with the higher sex drive (high-testosterone or “high-T,” for short) think they’ve found someone who can keep up with them. Meanwhile, the partner with less of a drive (low-T) believe they’ve found someone who can raise their libido and move them to be more highly motivated.

Research finds that testosterone is linked to sex drive. In her book *The Truth About Love*, Pat Love writes that “Scientists have known for decades that male sex drive is correlated with testosterone . . . a hormone produced in the testes and adrenals. While testosterone has been conclusively shown to highly correlate with male libido, it was long dismissed as a fact in the sex

drive of women. Then in the early 1990s, Dr. Barbara Sherwin, a researcher at McGill University in Montreal, published her classic study showing that women who received a testosterone treatment reported a greater upsurge in sexual arousal, more lustful fantasies, a stronger desire for sex, more frequent intercourse, and higher rates of orgasm.”

Because opposites attract, Dr. Love goes on to explain, it’s highly likely for high-T and low-T people to become drawn to each other. During their infatuation stage, they are matched with the help of nature’s “time-limited plan,” in her words—the temporary period of romantic love that bonds two people together. But when it drops them off in the second stage of love, the power struggle, the second stage of any relationship, people revert to their normal baseline libidos.

Couples often compare this second stage unfavorably to their first stage of romantic love. Because few people know about these physiological changes, they blame the problem on their partner. “You turned me on in the beginning,” says the low-T partner. “Why aren’t you turning me on now?”

“You liked the things we did in

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Are You a High T or a Low T?, continued

the beginning,” counters the high-T partner, “but now you’re holding out on me!” Many couples see this as the beginning of the end, but such is not the case. The truth is, both the low-T and high-T person need to learn to cooperate with one another and understand where the other is coming from. From *The Truth About Love*, here are some “Tips for the Lagging Libido.”

1. Ask not only what is best for you, but also what is best for the relationship.

Pat Love says that it’s unfair to be in a relationship and not engage in sexual activity, if that’s what your partner wants. Dr. Love says, “It isn’t fair to say to a partner, ‘I won’t be sexual with you, and you better not go get it somewhere else either.’” That’s a non-relational way of addressing the sexual issues.

2. Be a consumer activist for your sexual health.

Learn whatever you can about what you can do for your body and your personal chemistry to let yourself find pleasure in your sexual self.

3. Do what it takes to maintain a positive attitude about sex.

4. Make sex a priority.

Make it a priority that is, once you determine that sex is important to you and your relationship. At the beginning of therapy, couples are often not ready to do this, even if they want to. To make sex a priority, you must each feel safe and trusting of the other.

5. Understand that low desire is often no reflection on your relationship.

6. Understand that high sex drive can be normal for women, as well as men.

7. Accept the differences between you and your partner.

8. Communicate your sexual needs.

9. Be willing to give as well as receive.

And one additional tip I can add

10. Leave out judgments about your partner.

So very often I see couples judging each other negatively, simply because they have different sexual needs and desires. They usually fare much better once they both recognize their differences and accept that each has his/her own unique idea of what sex is. Then they’re willing to make changes as a couple.