

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

46% of UA students who are single or dating have never had sex.

(2008 Health & Wellness Survey, n=1,250)

Q. Is it true you lose it if you don't use it?

A. The "use it or lose it" question should not be dismissed as irrelevant as it was in the movie, "The 40 Year-Old Virgin."

When applying the "use it or lose it" concept regarding sexual function, keep in mind that sexual function decreases with age, whether you "use it" or not. For instance, vaginal lubrication typically occurs more slowly as women age and testosterone ("the libido hormone") levels normally decrease as men age.

There are a number of factors, for both genders, that can affect libido (sexual desire) and sexual function (erections and vaginal lubrication), but are not dependent on "using it or losing it" or on age. These factors include fatigue, depression, anxiety, stress, relationship issues, past sexual trauma, diabetes, and medications that have a sedative effect or that affect the autonomic nervous system. Some women experience a decline in their libido from the use of hormonal contraceptives (e.g. birth control pills), which can lead to the production of less vaginal lubrication. Vaginal dryness can also result from high blood pressure or from the use of condoms. Some men experience the inability to have an erection due to the side effects of medications, such as high blood pressure medication. And, studies show that stress can result in reduced testosterone levels in men.

Well, no need to worry. Rather than being concerned with the frequency of sex, sit back, relax, and enjoy! While things may slow down as we age, they continue to remain functional, regardless of "using it," so the capacity to give or receive pleasure remains. And, as some factors can affect our sex drive, there are ways to reduce their impact. For instance, if you're feeling stressed, there are stress reduction techniques that can be practiced; for vaginal dryness, there are lubrications; for decreased testosterone levels, there is testosterone replacement therapy.

For additional information regarding sex, relationships, and health, visit our website: www.health.arizona.edu.



Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

SexTalk is written by Lee Ann Hamilton, M.A., CHES, David Salafsky, MPH, and Roberta Padilla, MPH, health educators at The University of Arizona Campus Health Service.

