

The Ultimate Guide to Crazy Good Sex

*Men don't like to cuddle. We only like it if it leads to...
you know... lower cuddling.
Ray Barone*

The scene opens as the camera zooms in on the Barone house at night, and then into the bedroom where Ray is sitting next to Debra, his wife. She's lying down facing the camera, with her back to Ray, about to fall asleep.

Ray, the sports-writer in the long-running sitcom *Everybody Loves Raymond*, reaches over and gently touches her exposed shoulder. Eyes closed, Debra simply says, "No." He withdraws his hand, and then gently touches her again.

"No," comes the deadpan response. Again, Ray touches her shoulder, and still without moving or opening her eyes, Debra says, "No."

Then, with his brow wrinkled as if conducting an experiment, Ray reaches his hand over his wife's shoulder without touching her.

"No," comes the response—again with her eyes closed. Then, in response to three quick passes through the air over her shoulder, Debra says "No, No, No," each in precise timing with the passes. The scene ends as Ray reaches his hand far above her and, without touching her, swoops it down over her in what looks like an airplane pass. In a pitch that matches the height of the hand she cannot see, Debra responds, "NooooooOOOO."ⁱ

Ever felt like Ray Barone in this scene? Most married men readily confess to having their sexual advances toward their wife halted on more than one occasion. In fact, most married men believe that women do not want to have sex as much as we do. Over time the old reliable "Not tonight, I have a headache" has morphed into "I'm too tired tonight," but the message to us is the same. They don't want to have sex when we do. Maybe your wife has even accused you of being "insatiable." And you're amazed at how long she can go without ever even initiating sex with you.

So, you are wondering, how can I be saying this is a myth? Don't men, generally speaking, want more sex than women do?

Though it may seem that way for a variety of reasons, we are making a mistake to assume that just because it so often *feels* that way that it is true. The fact is our sex drives, for both men and women, fall along a continuum that looks like a bell curve, and most wives are right in the middle, wanting to have sex with their husbands just as much as their husbands want to have sex with them. Of course, some women actually have a stronger libido than their husband, but these marriages are in the minority.

So why all the hullabaloo about libido mismatch between men and women? And, more importantly, how can correcting this myth lead to better – and more frequent – sex in your own marriage?

I'll begin with a brief lesson on the female libido. Make no mistake, it is more complicated than ours. But if we accurately understand it, we'll not only see that it's unfair to unequivocally say that women don't want sex as much as we do, but we'll also

know how to cultivate it more fully. I'll then give you several practical suggestions for getting your seemingly disparate sex drives into the same gear.

What Women Want

In the film *Annie Hall*, Woody Allen and Diane Keaton are shown split-screen as each talks to an analyst about their sexual relationship. When the analyst asks how often they have sex, he answers, "Hardly ever, maybe three times a week," while she describes it as "constantly, three times a week."

How is it that a husband and wife can view the frequency of sex so differently? The answer is found, in great part, by understanding how a woman becomes sexually aroused and motivated. Too often, men assume that the way our libido works is (or should be) the same way hers works. But it's not that simple. In fact, it requires a bit of study. "Every woman is a science," said John Donne. And if you take a moment to study your wife, you will discover that her libido, though quite different than yours, is more powerful than you think.

Here are some of the most important points in understanding your wife's libido.

Women Equate Sex with Emotional Assurance

One reason for the perceived distinction in male-female motivations for sex is that we are socialized in different ways about sexuality and marriage. Men tend to see sex as a pleasurable, physical activity. In fact, even if you're feeling stressed or out of synch with your wife you're unlikely to turn down sex with her. Not so for women. Your wife sees sex as a sign of emotional bonding and confidence with you. She needs to feel sure of your emotional togetherness before she can free up her physical togetherness. And if she doesn't feel close and connected with you, your chances for feeling "close and connected" in bed are miniscule.

These separate meanings that the two genders ascribe to sex can become the source of a great deal of miscommunication and misunderstanding in marriage. Consider the following comments made by a wife and husband who step into my counseling office after three or four years of marriage:

Wife — He keeps saying he wants to make love, but it doesn't feel like love to me. Sometimes I feel bad that I feel that way, but I just can't help it.

Husband — I don't understand. She says it doesn't feel like love. What does that mean, anyway? What does she think love is? I want to have sex with her because I love her!

In this marriage, as in many others, the husband sees himself as showing his love to his wife by engaging her in sexual activity. The wife, on the other hand, sees sexual activity as something that should evolve out of verbal expressions of affection and love. Like a scene from a Woody Allen movie that cuts too close to home, this couple bickers continually about how frequently they have sex – never knowing that their socialization is contributing to their perceived difference in sexual motivation.

Women Withhold Sex When Feeling Hurt

Let's say your wife spoke harshly to you because you left your dirty socks on the floor. You felt she overreacted. You're perturbed. Maybe even angry. A few minutes pass and she walks into your den wearing nothing but a string of pearls around her neck and high heeled shoes. Now tell me, are you going to punish her by withholding sex because she hollered at you just minutes earlier about your dirty socks?

I don't even need to hear your answer.

But you probably need to hear your wife's answer when the roles are reversed. Why? Because unresolved emotional issues, even little ones, are at the root of some low libidos for women. Resentment, unexpressed anger, and hurt feelings can lead some women to withhold sex. Maybe she's too upset with you to let you touch her. Maybe she's hoping that rejecting you sexually will send a message that she either can't bring herself to say or can't seem to get across no matter how often she says it. Maybe she's simply punishing you. Is it right? Nope. Is it fair? No way. Is it healthy? Of course not. But it's a common occurrence and it rarely registers with men.

Say, for example, she feels taken for granted because you don't help around the house as much as she'd like. She thinks "If he isn't doing something for me, why should I have sex with him?" Now, of course you'd probably never dream of depriving yourself of sex in order to punish your wife, but women are wired differently. She can put her libido on hold until she regains the "emotional assurance" that tells her you're on her team.

Women Are More "Hormonal" than Men

When you're feeling frisky and your wife has a "headache," she may actually have a headache! Chances are it has nothing to do with your sexual desirability to her. And if you're hearing "I'm not in the mood" when you want to hear "meet me in the bedroom" whispers from your wife, it may be because her mood is being determined by her hormones. Again, it's likely to have nothing to do with your sexual attractiveness. Biological changes are far more likely to sap her libido than they are to sap yours. When was the last time you weren't "in the mood"? Is your memory failing you on this one? If so, that's because, if you're like most men, you can generally get in the mood at the drop of a hat (or any other article of clothing). You're typically not battling a surge of hormones that cause you to question your body image or your wife's acceptance of you.

And, let's be honest, we don't have to deal with "that time of the month," and all the hormonal mood swings that can come with it. Not to mention the physical cramping. When she turns you down because she's "too tired," it's most likely true. Getting some shut-eye can sound a whole lot better than getting some action when your hormones are going berserk. Now, you and I, as men, think "Well, you'd drift off to sleep a lot easier if you first had a feel-good orgasm." That's true, for men. But then (as we'll see more fully in another chapter) sex doesn't begin with getting naked for a woman. It takes more time and work than that.

We are so prone to attribute her "lack of desire" to be an overarching condition that pervades the entire relationship when the truth is that she can be very motivated sexually – when her hormones aren't taking her on an emotional roller coaster ride.

Here's the point: For a woman, hormones can mean she feels like having lots of sex at a particular time, rather than sex all of the time.

And to avoid the questions I'm likely to get on my website, let me tell you exactly when that "particular time" is. It has to do with a neurochemical called Oxytocin, often referred to as the bonding hormone. It spikes right before ovulation, a time when most women are in the mood. And here's some really good news. According to Daniel G. Amen, MD, a psychiatrist, brain imaging specialist, and author of *Sex on the Brain*, oxytocin also helps dull your wife's memory of your annoying traits (like your dirty socks on the floor). In other words, this is also when she is likely to feel most attracted to you.

A Woman's Sex Drive Can Be More Easily Distracted

Okay. So you've given your wife "the look." It says, "Let's go!" You're ready to rumble. She gets the message but says, "I'll come to bed right after I fold this laundry" ... or "make the kids' lunch for tomorrow" ... or "take out the recycling." I know. I understand. You can't imagine doing any of those things yourself if your wife were to give you "the look." You're ready to go. Now. So why isn't she? The reason is not that men want sex more than women; it's that men are often able to get aroused more quickly and sexually ready than women. This is critically important to understand. I'm not only talking about foreplay once you are between the sheets. That's a given. I'm talking about initiating sex, being ready to even enter the bedroom with sex on your mind.

Allow me to reiterate: women, unlike men, do not separate sex from the emotional aspects of the relationship. Women want a sense of connection that is experienced for more than an hour before approaching the sexual starting line. But they also don't want anything distracting them from it once their sexual engine is about to be turned on. That's why they take more care than we do to go through their mental check list. They need to be sure the kids are in bed, the door is locked, the shades are shut, and so on. They don't want any loose ends keeping them from focusing on sex once you get started.

According to brain scan research, women's brains are naturally more active than men's, even during sex. The reason: lower levels of the neurotransmitter dopamine. "Dopamine creates the desire to go after a reward--in this case, an orgasm," explains Anita Clayton, MD, clinical professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Virginia.¹¹ You're more likely to have more Dopamine than your wife and that's why you're more goal-oriented when it comes to sex – less distracted.

It's a fact. Your wife is far more vulnerable to distraction from sex than you are and that can keep her sexual engine from starting when you want it to. But don't discount her sex drive because of it. It's just different than yours. If she has an unfinished task, let her finish it. Better yet, help her finish it. You'll be amazed how her libido picks up steam and you'll be pleased to see how fully present she is while you're making love. An undistracted woman, given time to rev up her sexual engine, will be far more "into it" than a woman who feels pressured and duty-bound to be ready to go at a moment's notice.

How to Align Your “Mismatched Libidos”

In a perfect world, you and your wife would have flawlessly matched libidos all the time—but we both know that's never going to be the case. You can't expect to have her sex drive always match your own. But if you're feeling like you're being turned down because she's got a "headache" a little more frequently than you should be, I want to offer some practical ideas. After all, perpetual libido differences can drive a big wedge between a husband and wife. So for the sake of your marriage, as well as our sex life, it's essential to keep that to a minimum. The following are proven suggestions for putting your two sex-drives in the same gear.

Let Go of the Myth

It's true - you find what you're looking for. If you want evidence to indicate that your wife doesn't want sex as much as you do, you'll find plenty of it. But if you're ready to equal the scales of sexual desire, you've got to get over this common male myth by seeing her in a new light. One of the best ways to do this is by putting an end to snide comments or innuendos that highlight a perceived libido difference. Every time you say something, even under your breath, like, “well if we ever had sex ...,” you're driving a sexual wedge between you. By the way, this means not only forgoing these comments with her, but when you're out with the boys as well. Set your mind to seeing your wife on the same side with you. She wants to have a great sex life as much as you do. And if you don't believe me, just ask her.

Discuss Your Sex Drives

When was the last time you talked with your wife about her sex drive? It's not a common conversation for most couples. Yet it's critically important for getting your libidos to line up. When the time is right, when both of you are relatively relaxed and not distracted, ask her when she feels most frisky? Her answer may surprise you. I have a friend who told me he recently discovered that his wife found him most sexy when he wore a suit. He joked about wearing it to bed. The point is that you need to know as much as you can about her sexual desires. Ask her about the time of day, as well as the time of month, she is most inclined to want to have sex. Ask her what would make it easier or more fun for her.

Make Initiations Easier

One of the things I hear from women who are in couple's counseling for this issue is that they don't like to be the one initiating sex. Some women are simply uncomfortable with saying, “Would you like to make love?” If you're married to a woman like this, you've no doubt attributed her shyness in this area to a lack of libido. But that's a mistake. Instead, make it easier for her to initiate sex with you. Find a sign or a signal that will make this almost effortless for her. For example, it may be that there's a candle she could light, or a particular song she could play, or a look she could give that would be her signal that she'd like to have sex. You get the idea. So don't waste time. Talk to her about what could be used to make the her initiations easier.

Take Your Time

Let's say that to really enjoy sex you'd need to be in a particular mood. You'd need to feel completely safe and understood by your wife – and this would need to begin long before you even thought about jumping into bed. Oh, and to become sexually aroused you'd need some warm up time that might begin with several minutes of gentle caressing interspersed with pillow talk. The lights would need to be low, you'd need to consider what you're wearing, and you'd need some time to brush your teeth and prepare yourself physically.

Hard to imagine, right? But I'm sure you're getting the point. If you want your wife to be more forthcoming with her sexual desires, you've got to do your part in helping her love your love making sessions. A little empathy can go a long way in getting you to slow it down a bit and set the stage for passionate sex that makes her feel great.

Reduce Distractions

One of the biggest reasons that this myth of unequal libidos persists is because men rarely give consideration to what is distracting women from sex. After all, most of the time, it takes a lot to distract us from the effort! That's why we need to take special care in doing whatever we can to keep distractions for her to a minimum. You probably already know what they are, but if not, ask your wife to tell you.

If you have children, that's inevitably going to top the list. So will any emotional or conversational loose ends between her and you or anyone else. She may be distracted by tomorrow's busy schedule, an upcoming dinner party, a doctor's appointment, an unpaid bill. You name it. So if you want her libido to be raring to go tonight, first find out what might be getting in its way and do what you can to remove it. But please don't do the typical macho move of "fixing" her problem so you can have sex. That is sure to backfire.

Pay attention to what dampens her sexual desires by listening patiently. Bite your tongue if you're about to spout off a quick solution. Make sure she feels understood. That's all. You'll be amazed at how much your "doing nothing" can increase her libido.

Touch Her Feelings Before You Touch Her Body

If you want to rev up your wife's sexual motor, you'll need a heart-felt message to turn on her ignition. She's hardwired to become sexually motivated when you romance her, when you whisper those proverbial "sweet nothings" in her ear. It doesn't take much. You don't need to compose a poem. You simply need to let her know how much she means to you. Anything endearing will do. You can say things like, "You mean so much to me," or "You're the best part of my day." Of course, you have to be genuine when you say these things. If you're just "making a move," forget it. She'll read right through you. Every woman knows the difference between manipulative come-ons and heart-felt sweet nothings.

Help Around the House

Okay. I know. I can almost see you cringing on this one. I'm not intending to put you on a guilt trip if you're already feeling like your wife is haranguing you for not doing your fair share. But let me just state the facts from some recent research— then you can determine whether doing a little dusting is worth increasing her libido. A University of Washington study found that men who help with the housework have more active sex lives with their wives than their dishtowel-shunning brethren.ⁱⁱⁱ That was the bottom line of this scholarly study. Need more incentive? A 2003 University of California study found that women are not only more sexually receptive to men who help clean up at home, they're actually more physically attracted to them.^{iv} So you decide.

Tune Into Her Hormones

I mentioned Oxytocin, “the bonding hormone,” earlier. It's what helps your wife get “in the mood” and it increases before she ovulates. Well, you don't have to be a biologist to know that this occurs every thirty days. So make note of it. You don't have to tell her if you don't want to, but you can certainly discuss it together. Why not make a date of it? Also, on the topic of hormones, did you realize that as men and women age, our testosterone levels drop? In fact, the decrease in testosterone is slower in women. *So what?*, you're asking. Well, this gradual decrease can cause women to desire sex more often than men their own age. That's one of the reasons that women reach their sexual prime much later than men do. And that's not a bad thing.

By the way, it should be noted that in some cases, your wife's lack of desire for sex, especially if it is consistent over long periods of time, may also be a result of a hormonal imbalance. If you and she suspect that this is the case, she should consult with her gynecologist about this possibility, or get expert input from an endocrinologist. Being in balance hormonally -- especially having ample testosterone in her body -- may kick her sex drive back into gear.

For Reflection

- What psychological benefits do we gain by believing that we want sex more than women? Why do we propel this myth?
- The next time you hear a friend purporting that women don't want sex as much as men, are you likely to correct him? If so, how? If not, why?

From the suggestions given in this chapter, which one do you find most meaningful and why? In other words, which one are you most likely to put into practices first?

ⁱ "Standard Deviation," *Everybody Loves Raymond* (Season 1, Disc 1).

ⁱⁱ Anita H. Clayton (2003). Women's mental health. *Psychiatric Clinics of North America*, 26 (3), 132-148.

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Brines (1994). Economic dependency, gender and the division of labor at home. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 199 (3), pp. 652-688.

^{iv} See also, D. M. Buss and T. K. Shackelford (2001). A half century of mate preferences: the cultural evolution of values. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 63 (2), 491-503.