

# Silence about sexual problems can hurt relationships

It's the kind of problem most people hope is a one-time occurrence. But when a man or a woman has difficulty becoming aroused or can't perform during sex with his or her partner, it's a real problem that has to be addressed.

Results from a national survey of people aged 18 to 59 years reported in

the February 10, 1999, issue of *JAMA* indicate that sexual dysfunction was common among women (43%) and men (31%).

Most cases of sexual dysfunction are treatable. The first step is to realize that a problem exists and seek help from a professional.

## TYPES OF DYSFUNCTION:

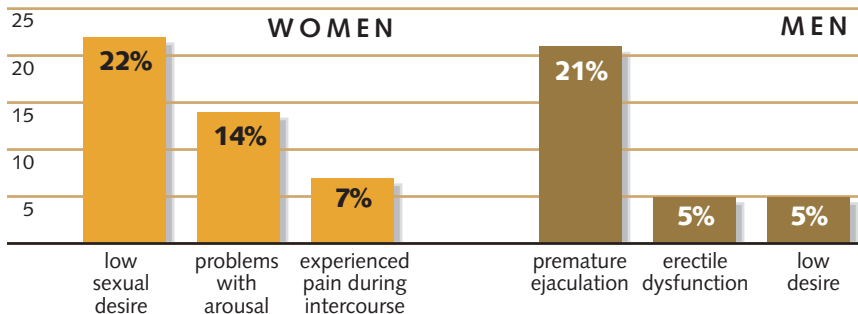
- **Inhibited sexual desire** – Lack of sexual desire or inability to become physically aroused during sexual activity. Caused by a variety of physical or psychological problems.
- **Painful intercourse** – Pain during intercourse can be caused by a number of physical or psychological problems, including hormonal changes, poor vaginal lubrication, **vaginitis** (inflammation of the vagina), sexually transmitted diseases, and the use of spermicides. The condition is known as **dyspareunia**.

### FOR WOMEN

- **Lack of orgasm** – Inability to achieve orgasm. Caused by sexual inhibition, inexperience, lack of knowledge, or psychological factors such as anxiety or early sexual trauma.
- **Vaginismus** – A painful, involuntary spasm of the muscles that surround the vaginal entrance, which interferes with sexual intercourse. Usually occurs in women who fear that penetration will be painful and may stem from a previous traumatic or painful experience.

### FOR MEN

- **Erectile dysfunction** – Inability to achieve or maintain an erection for satisfactory sexual intercourse. Also known as **impotence**. An estimated 20 million U.S. men, mostly older than 65 years, are affected but less than 10% of affected men actually receive treatment.
- **Ejaculatory disorders** – When ejaculation occurs before or soon after penetration (**premature**), ejaculation does not occur (**inhibited**), or the ejaculate is forced back into the bladder (**retrograde**).



More women reported sexual dysfunction than men.

## CAUSES OF DYSFUNCTION:

- **Physical causes** – Underlying physical conditions that can cause sexual problems include diabetes, heart disease, neurological disorders, pelvic surgery or trauma, side effects of medications, chronic disease like kidney or liver failure, hormonal imbalances, alcoholism and drug abuse, or heavy smoking.
- **Psychological causes** – Stress or anxiety from work, concern about poor sexual performance, marital discord, unresolved sexual orientation, depression, previous traumatic sexual experience.

## TREATMENT:

Most types of sexual dysfunction can be corrected by treating the underlying physical or psychological problems. Discuss specific treatment options with your doctor.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- American Foundation for Urologic Disease  
Sexual Function Health Council  
1126 N. Charles St.  
Baltimore, MD 21201  
410/468-1800 or [www.impotence.org](http://www.impotence.org)
- National Kidney and Urologic Diseases Information Clearinghouse  
3 Information Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3580  
or [www.niddk.nih.gov](http://www.niddk.nih.gov)

## INFORM YOURSELF:

To find this and previous *JAMA* Patient Pages, check out the AMA's Web site at [www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm](http://www.ama-assn.org/consumer.htm).

Additional Sources: American Foundation for Urologic Disease, American Urological Association, AMA's Encyclopedia of Medicine

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