

FITNESS REPORT

A sexual second wind?

Exercise can rev up a tired libido

Does working out turn you on? If you feel a little randy after a vigorous aerobic workout, you aren't alone. Getting physical boosts desire, arousal and the ability to achieve orgasm, at least for women who exercise moderately, according to a recent survey.

Linda De Villers, a clinical psychologist in West Los Angeles, polled more than 8,000 women to examine the effect exercise has on sexuality, and reported her results at the national convention of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sex. "I'd noticed that after a day of skiing or swimming, I felt more interested in sex," says De Villers. "This ran counter to the commonly held belief that since exercise is tiring it decreases interest in sex. I was curious to learn if a sexual second wind was a common phenomenon."

It turns out that being turned on after a workout is a fact of life for many women. Of those surveyed, 83% had been doing some form of aerobic exercise three or more times a week for at least three months. One-quarter of those respondents said they felt an increase in sexual desire immediately after physical exertion, while just 3% said exercise dampened their interest.

The libido boost is most evident among younger women. 39% of the 18- to 24-year-old women surveyed reported an increase in desire after exercise, compared with 17% of the women aged 45 to 49. Says De Villers, "Many older women are more in tune with their sexuality to begin with. Exercise may help get younger women more in touch."

The long-term effects of an exercise program are, happily, even more pronounced than the short-term benefits. 31% of the women who responded to the De Villers questionnaire said they had sex more often once they began their exercise program; a full 40% noted an increase in their ability to be aroused; and more than one-quarter experienced an increase in their ability to climax. A smaller group (5%) even said their orgasms were more intense right after a workout.

Moreover, 98% reported that regular exercise augmented their overall self-confidence, and 89% reported exercise gave their sexual confidence a boost. Both responses correlated to how long a woman had been exercising and whether she lost weight.

"It's important to recognize that there is a difference between self-confidence and sexual confidence," says De Villers. "Self-confidence is about a woman's overall sense of competence and inner integrity. Sexual confidence speaks more to one's sense of adequacy as a sexual being."

Yet that's not to say that sexual confidence is unrelated to a woman's other feelings about herself. "Sexual confidence correlates with other variables, such as greater respect for one's body and increased sensitivity to the cues it gives us," says De Villers. "A woman who is sexually self-confident sees her body as an ally rather than an enemy. She's in her body, not her head."

—Kay Marie Porterfield

