

# PILLOW TALK

## Answers to 20 most often asked questions

By Larry Wichman

In the gym, you spend hours talking bodybuilding with your buddies. You think nothing of sharing new training techniques you've picked up for carving delts or for getting those abs to ripple just right. But do you and your gym mates ever talk sex — that is, other than to brag about your latest conquests? No. Few of us

ever disclose the intimate details of our sex life.

Yet, just as sharing training information helps you be a better athlete, learning what others do in bed will make you a better lover. It provides you with a means to realistically evaluate your own sexual behavior and to compare your expectations with reality.

### 1) ARE MOST PEOPLE'S SEXUAL EXPECTATIONS UNREALISTIC?

Studies have shown that few couples have anything close to a perfect sex life. But then few of us ever expect or desire anything other than simple, satisfying sex.

"People are not unrealistic," states Dr. Linda De Villers, a Los Angeles psychologist specializing in human sexual relationships. "The typical person isn't saying, 'Gee, sex is supposed to be the experience of the century every time.' A lot of women would like to climax during sex. That's not unreasonable. A lot of women would like foreplay. That's not unreasonable either. Men would like an active partner — the

number one complaint is 'She just lies there!' — that's also not unreasonable.

"On the other hand, if you have a dual-income couple and they get home at 10 p.m. every night, and they can't understand why their sex isn't wonderful, those are unrealistic expectations."

### 2) IS SEXUAL PERFORMANCE ANXIETY NORMAL FOR MEN?

It's extremely common for men at any age to worry about their sexual prowess. Young men are concerned that their inexperience and eagerness will lead to premature ejaculation. Older men worry that their erection may be losing rigidity, or that it's not springing forth as routinely as it once did.

Performance anxiety affects even the most sexually active men. Many admit that they feel insecure the first few times they get into bed with a new

partner, and that more often than not, their worst fears come true.

According to De Villers, the best way to approach the problem is to be open about it. "Men need to be more willing to express vulnerable feelings," she says. "In this case, the man is more likely to have trouble if he keeps his fears to himself, which is what typically happens. He needs to share his insecurities. He needs to tell the woman that he thinks she's wonderful, 'but let's take things slow.' That's a big key to getting beyond it."

### 3) CONTROLLING CLIMAX: HOW QUICK IS TOO QUICK?

Many men feel that they climax too quickly. For some that may mean a few thrusts. For others, a few minutes. It's very subjective.

Yet, according to many therapists, the issue is not how quickly you cli-

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*Larry Wichman, the author of The Musician's Guide to Home Recording, is a contributor to numerous national publications.*

*Dr. DeVillers can be contacted at: 1516 Westwood Blvd., Suite 205, Los Angeles, CA 90024 (213) 670-1813.*



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max, but rather whether you climax too quickly for your partner. "If the man climaxes in two or three minutes, most women would not appreciate it," says Dr. De Villers. "Research shows that for women who are able to climax strictly through intercourse, coitus usually continues for 15-20 minutes."

There are many variables which contribute to rapid ejaculation. There are biological factors, such as an overly sensitive glans or insufficient vaginal lubrication. Or it may be due to a person's past experiences, such as a pattern of rapid ejaculation during masturbation. There's even one theory that says ejaculation is a normal biological variant — that some men have a natural tendency toward quick climax.

Yet, a typical male can learn to control this. "If the guy pays more attention to sensations, he can learn to slow it down," De Villers explains. "Or he can use positions which help decrease the sensitivity."

### 4) DO WOMEN WORRY ABOUT THEIR SEXUAL PERFORMANCE?

"Yes, but a little differently than

men," says De Villers. "Their primary concerns are more body concerns. They worry about things like, 'Are my breasts okay? Is my stomach hanging out?'"

Many single, sexually active women also complain that they feel pressured to be multiorgasmic. Men, they say, have been influenced by articles on the subject and expect them to have one orgasm after another. "Women are smart enough to know that men like women who climax," De Villers adds. "So, if they have trouble achieving orgasm, that's where they'll worry about their performance."

### 5) WHAT DOES IT MEAN IF I CAN'T GET AN ERECTION?

Male impotence is more common than people realize. "Most men experience temporary impotence at some point in their lives," says De Villers. "That doesn't mean they're suffering erectile dysfunction. It has to be a regular thing to be considered a problem. Some people would say if it starts happening 20% of the time, you may have cause for concern."

Urologists now believe that 80% of all impotence can be attributed to illness, fatigue or drug or alcohol abuse, or to stress from marital problems, financial worries, frustration at work or fear of failure — all correctable conditions.

Yet, even temporary impotence can damage a man's sense of masculinity. "I don't see how it can't in this culture," says De Villers. "That's asking somebody to be very intellectual about something that is emotionally powerful. The mythology of the culture says that the man should always be ready and capable of having sex."

### 6) CAN A POOR SELF-IMAGE HINDER PERFORMANCE?

Studies show that a man's perception of himself has a tremendous impact on his sexual prowess. If he sees himself as a great lover, he'll perform like a champ. If he feels weak or insecure, his insecurities will undermine his performance.

"Any little glitch that occurs is magnified," says De Villers. "If he's had trouble with rapid ejaculation or with gaining an erection in the past, already he's terrorized. Men with better self-esteem would put that into perspective a lot more easily."

Of course, bodybuilding does wonders for your self-confidence. Ac-

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According to the psychologist, it may just make you a more capable lover as well. "There are both a physical and a psychological component," she contends. "Physically, you're going to have more stamina. You're in better shape. Your whole biological function is better. You also look better, which is going to give you more confidence.

"Plus, when people get into exercise programs, they have a sense of commitment to something. It's a form of self-improvement. Their self-esteem goes up and they're more positive about the world."

### 7) HOW DO WOMEN RESPOND TO MALE PERFORMANCE PROBLEMS?

A woman's reaction will often depend upon the duration and status of the relationship. Some sex therapists have found that young women in new relationships are often confused by their lover's performance problems. They either blame the man or they blame themselves. Few recognize that it may be a physical problem that

neither of them has any control over.

However, De Villers has found that experienced women tend to be more understanding. "By and large, women are reasonably accepting of the problem," she says. "Most are usually willing to participate in a therapy program if that's what's called for. In fact, some women are so compassionate, they actually contribute to the problem. They say, 'Oh honey, it's okay,' which makes the guy feel even more like a schmuck!"

### 8) DO WOMEN NEED AN ORGASM TO BE SEXUALLY SATISFIED?

Although some women find the sensual/sexual pleasure they receive during coitus satisfying, an overwhelming majority prefer to have an orgasm. "It doesn't necessarily have to come during intercourse," De Villers explains. "A lot of women don't climax during coitus. But with a little creativity, there ought to be ways of having them climax at some point during the sexual activity — whether it's before, after or during intercourse."

In most cases, the lack of orgasm is due to poor communication. Many women have difficulty explaining to

their lover the specific stimulation they require to reach a climax, while the typical male doesn't fully understand that each woman has her own individual needs. In fact, typically men mistakenly believe that their technique should work for every lover they take to bed. If there's a problem, they automatically assume that it's the woman's fault.

### 9) IS IT WRONG FOR A WOMAN TO FAKE AN ORGASM?

Studies have shown that almost all women have at one time or another faked an orgasm. Some do it to boost the confidence of their lover. Others do it to get their partner more excited, while others just want to get sex over with.

Even in the most innocent of cases, however, there is reason to be concerned. "By faking orgasm, a woman is setting herself up for continued sexual dissatisfaction," says De Villers. "It shuts down the sexual communication. It increases the probability that if she isn't getting much out of the sex anyway, she may lose her desire."

The problem is that once a woman begins to fake orgasm, there's no turn-



unless you want to start washing the dishes for me.'"

Yet, not all such conflicts are easily resolved, particularly if one of the partners has an overactive sex drive or the reverse. In these cases, therapy should be considered.

### **17) HOW OLD IS TOO OLD?**

Psychologists agree that there's no such thing as being too old to enjoy sex. "For people who are healthy, sexuality doesn't end until you die," says De Villers. "Recent studies have shown that couples are sexually active well into their 70s and beyond." In fact, she adds, older couples often say that sex gets better in later years because they have more time to enjoy it and fewer distractions.

Masters and Johnson showed that, in relative terms, age has little effect on your sex drive. They found, for example, that a man who had a high sex drive at age 20 was likely to have a high sex drive at 50 — although the overall level of desire may have waned somewhat.

An older male's ability to respond to sexual stimulus is another matter — but then the sexual response of a man at 40 is going to be different than it was

when he was 20. Some men begin to panic when they first notice any change. Some even avoid sex altogether. Yet, instead of overreacting, you simply need to realize that as you grow older, you may have to alter your expectations.

### **18) CAN GOOD SEX HOLD A BAD RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER?**

"Not likely," says De Villers. "I've worked with many women who've said, 'I would have left him a lot sooner but the sex was great.'"

Although sex is important to a relationship, it's not the sort of tie that binds. Emotional fulfillment is much more important than physical pleasure. So, while a good relationship may continue to thrive even though the sex is mediocre, a bad relationship based on terrific sex is likely to dissolve.

### **19) IS SHOWING PHYSICAL AFFECTION IMPORTANT?**

Many happily married couples maintain that hugging and kissing can be as emotionally satisfying as sex itself. It's

a way of sharing intimacy.

However, men are typically inept at showing affection, and many women complain that the only time their mates get romantic is when they want sex. "That's one of their major complaints: 'He only touches me when he wants to make love,'" De Villers says. The fact is, a little tenderness can go a long way in a relationship.

### **20) WHAT AM I DOING WRONG?**

The only person who can answer that question is your mate. And she's likely to tell you only if you ask.

Lack of communication is one of the primary causes of sexual dissatisfaction. "When people don't communicate, things just continue to go wrong," says De Villers. "Problems intensify. I've even heard of a case where a couple who'd lived together for 20 years came into therapy, and one of them said, 'You know, I've always *bated* it when you nibble on my ear!' For 20 years the person had never even mentioned it!"

It's just as important to communicate your likes as your dislikes, whether during sex or afterward. Get it out in the open. At least then if there's a problem you can work on it. □