

# Let's Talk About Sex



Many of us find talking about sex embarrassing and difficult. Our relationships expert, **Keren Smedley**, answers some of your most intimate questions



**W**e're so much more open and willing these days to talk in the abstract about sexual matters and watch quite explicit sexual images on TV and in the cinema. But talking to our nearest and dearest or even to close women friends about our sexual feelings, desires and behaviours is still very difficult for many of us. Communication is important for any healthy relationship as it allows us to share feelings and tackle problems together. This is particularly true of your sex life, especially if something is worrying you. Many of the letters I receive are about sexual matters. I hope the selection below will answer some of your concerns and will encourage you to talk more openly with those you are intimate with.

## It may be time for a gadget curfew

**Q** My partner seems to be more in love with his tablet and phone than with me. We used to have sex in the morning but now he prefers catching up with the news. At night, he's either watching a movie or he's on Facebook. I used to think the TV was bad enough, but at least we watched it together.

**A** Research released last November revealed there had been a decline in the frequency that Britons have sex. The top reason given was that technology was creeping into the bedroom. And 16% of those surveyed even reported looking at their phones during sex! By taking our work, the news or films to bed with us, we not only damage our sex lives but our ability to rest, recharge our own batteries and enjoy a good night's sleep. The only way to combat this is to agree between you that these items are banned from the bedroom. Explain what it's doing to you and ask him to leave them at the door. If anyone needs you in an emergency, they'll phone your landline.

## There's no 'right or wrong' with mutual consent

**Q** My friend invited me to an Ann Summers party. I've never seen such things! I knew about vibrators and whips (not that I could imagine using them) but not about nipple clamps and couple massagers. We've always had a good sex life but I never realised there were all these things out there. I admit, some of them really turned me on. Is there something wrong with wanting to give them a try?

**A** The short answer is no! As long as both of you are happy to experiment and try things out that don't harm or hurt anyone, then there's no reason why not. It's important, though, to go at the pace that suits you both and for you each to consent and to feel free to say that a particular toy or item isn't for you, so make sure you keep talking things through. But it's always good to try something new.

## Coax out his reasons

**Q** I met my new partner about a year ago. I really love him, but I enjoy oral sex both ways and he doesn't. I can live without doing it to him but I really like my clitoris being stimulated and feel as though I'm missing out. He says it just isn't for him.

**A** When it comes to sex, we all have different preferences so it's important to honour them. That said, it's also

important that we respond to our partner's desires so they have a good experience and feel sexually satisfied. You'd benefit from discussing this a bit further and finding out the reasons he's not turned on by oral sex. He may have had a bad experience or been told it wasn't a nice thing to do. Early messages about sex can influence our adult beliefs and practices. If you can't resolve this on your own, try talking to your GP or contact the College for Sexual and Relationship Therapy (020 8543 2707; cosrt.org.uk).

## Ageing needn't kill your confidence

**Q** I'm 54 and through the menopause. I'm no longer the woman I was. I look at myself in the mirror and I just can't bear it. My husband is the same age as me and he still looks great. I really feel like the invisible woman. He says he still finds me attractive but I think he's just being kind. Last night, he asked me why I'd stopped wearing my sexy nightwear. The truth is that it's because I feel so unsexy.

**A** You're right: you aren't the woman you were but that doesn't mean

you aren't equally, if not more, gorgeous. If you're comparing yourself to a 21-year-old, you'll always feel bad. Start to focus on what you've got – beautiful eyes, for example, or lovely nails or slim ankles. At times, older women can make themselves invisible. I guarantee if you went out wearing a miniskirt you'd be noticed! I'm not suggesting you do that but, while you hide away under baggy clothes, no one will see you. And please don't rebuff your husband. Listen to and believe him, and start showing off your beautiful older body.

## Respect fuels desire

**Q** My husband was made redundant a couple of years ago. He's found it really difficult and is very snappy with me and sometimes downright nasty. I understand he's feeling bad about himself and making love will make him feel valued. The problem is that I can't get into the mood, and he has trouble maintaining an erection. I really want to talk to him about all this but don't know how to start.

**A** I understand that somebody who's unpleasant towards you doesn't turn you on. That's the issue you and he now need to tackle. Sex isn't just a physical act. Our biggest sex organ is our brain and yours is telling you to avoid intimacy with someone who you feel doesn't respect you. For many men, losing their job emasculates them and this is now being acted out when you make love. He'll also be able to sense that you aren't very keen. Over the years, how have you and your husband talked and overcome other difficulties? You'll have a strategy that works so use that this time. See it as an ordinary problem, not different because it's about sex. Failing that, you could try relationship counselling. Try talking to your GP or contact Relate – call 0300 100 1234, or visit relate.org.uk

## Don't let your 'inner child' win!

**Q** My elderly mother has come to live with us as she can no longer manage on her own. She's moved into my daughter's old bedroom, which is next door to ours. It's had a disastrous effect on my love life. Just the thought of making love with her in the house makes me feel so uncomfortable. I know this is ridiculous as we've been married for 30 years and have three children, but I'm back to being a child again.

**A** You're not being ridiculous because, in your and your mother's eyes, you're the child and she's the grown-up. It's natural that, on occasion, you revert to this state of mind. However, it isn't healthy. It's really important that you and your husband behave just as you always have done, otherwise you'll be creating different problems. Whenever you feel the child in you coming on, tell yourself to stop and then reconnect with your adult self. When you're in bed with your husband, focus on him and don't let your thoughts wander to your mother. You could always put on some romantic music so she'd be less likely to be disturbed by you.