Romance and Menopause

by AFRA WILLMORE

Keeping Romance Alive Despite Menopause

It's been a long day. I feel exhausted. I can detect a faintly unpleasant smell emanating from myself and deduce that my antiperspirant deodorant has failed miserably in its task of keeping me dry and fresh through innumerable hot flashes. Forget the bear with a sore head - I feel like a bear with an axe through my head with the headache that has descended upon my hormonal brow.

Speaking of axes, it would probably be wise to hide any household or garden tools which could be used as a weapon as I feel an irrational rage inflating from my very core. I say irrational but my other half forgot to put his dinner plate in the dishwasher and in my menopausal eyes that is a clear motive for murder. Isn't it?

And then, dear reader, I notice the glint in his eye as he shuffles over to me on the couch. The children are in bed and I want nothing more than to quell my stress with some mindless TV followed by blissful oblivion in sleep but he has other ideas.

To be fair, I should be flattered that he still wants to see my battle-scarred, child-birth-wrecked body naked and delighted that he still sees me in a romantic fashion. But believe me, sex is usually the last thing on my mind.

I know I am not alone in this feeling. Many of my friends have confessed to imaginary illnesses, lengthy or even fictional menstrual periods or have feigned deep sleep to avoid any bedroom antics.

My case is not helped by the fact that I have a prolapse, apparently caused by the diminishing oestrogen in my body as the menopause well and truly takes hold. This makes sex uncomfortable at best and downright painful at times. Oestrogen pessaries help the physical symptoms but along with the tablets I take for menopausal high blood pressure, I feel like a broken old hag.

So what can be done about lack of sex drive and romance? Well it depends whether it's due to physical aspects of the menopause or a feeling of being old, unattractive or frumpy.

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Getting your Sex Life Back

- First call? Your doctor, who might be able to prescribe HRT (Hormone Replacement Therapy) which will halt many menopausal symptoms like hot or cold flashes, restless sleep, headaches or prolapse.
- Or it might be time to think about chemical help with your mood - some antidepressants can be taken at very low doses and as well as making you feel more like the old you, can help you sleep - and everyone feels better after a good night's sleep.
- Not keen on medical assistance? Then it might just be time to think about what made you a great couple

in the first place. Remind yourself you are more than parent, employee, and committee member.
- If you have kids, get a babysitter if needed and take time to be a couple again. Just one night away, even if it's close to home, can bring back intimacy when you aren't listening out for "Mom!" or the doorbell or phone, the morning alarm or the timer on the oven.
- Plan a romantic picnic or take time for a walk together, without the family, or a nice meal out without a kid's menu.
- Maybe you used to enjoy a sport together? Book the tennis court or head to the swimming pool as regularly as you can, just the two of you. Shared jokes, conversations which aren't constantly interrupted and the exercise will likely put you much more in the mood if you know what I mean.

- You could also think about taking up a new hobby altogether if the one you used to share is no longer practical or physically possible. My husband and I have discovered a new passion for antiquing and spend many a happy hour browsing junk shops and markets together.
- Focus on yourself too. Take a look at your wardrobe and think what it says about your state of mind. Is it all dark colours, sensible styles matched with underwear your grandma would have been happy wearing?
- Time to treat yourself to just couple of pieces which remind you of the "old" you. The one that went dancing, and splashing in puddles and left silly romantic notes in your other half's lunchbox.
- You may have lost track of what size underwear you really need and, like me, possibly pick up most of your underwear in the supermarket while doing the family shop. Put down that three-pack of cotton shorts and head to a proper lingerie shop or department store with trained fitters. Those saggy, droopy flaps which you used to call breasts can be transformed by a good well-fitting bra and a different style of knickers can hide a multitude of stretch-marked sins.
- Choose the colours which make you feel sexy whether that's black pvc or crisp white satin and silk - it will help you walk tall in and out of the bedroom and you will have the bonus of knowing that if you are hit by a bus, the paramedics (and the reality TV crew which will inevitably be following them) will see them rather than the greying, fraying items you normally sport.

Conclusion

Whatever you decide, the basic principle is to blow gently on the flames of your love which should ignite the passion again. Turn that TV off and enjoy an early night - together.