



Bed death? Absolutely not! Angie MacDonald found the answer when menopause struck

“THE MENOPAUSE ALMOST DESTROYED MY RELATIONSHIP”

ANGIE MACDONALD WAS UNPREPARED FOR THE PROFOUND EFFECT MENOPAUSE HAD ON HER HEALTH AND RELATIONSHIP, UNTIL SHE DISCOVERED TESTOSTERONE

In February my partner and I celebrated our 20th anniversary. But back in 2012 I wasn't sure we were going to make it. Depressed, irritable and easily stressed out, I found myself experiencing heart palpitations, hot flushes, irregular periods and a host of other symptoms. I especially did not want to have sex. My libido had completely disappeared and vaginal dryness made any attempt at lovemaking frustrating and uncomfortable.

We had always been an affectionate couple but I began to feel panicked each time my partner hinted at intimacy. I recoiled from her touch. Each stroke felt like unwanted sexual pressure, every kiss a violation of my personal space. Overwhelmed by shame, my lack of desire was this burden I carried around with me, like a dirty little secret. I wanted to be left alone.

So, I withdrew. I made up excuses. I sabotaged attempts to have sex by falling asleep or feeling ill. We took to sleeping in separate beds most nights and I was relieved. But it meant we were living as if we were just housemates, victims of that dreaded fate, “lesbian bed death”.

My partner was deeply hurt. She felt rejected and saddened by the fact that I no longer desired her. The more I withdrew, the more she tried to connect with me and the more demanding she appeared.

When the sex disappears from a relationship tension soon mounts. We would often argue over something trivial but it was clear what the real issue was.

The turning point came after yet another fierce argument. I realised I had to do some-

thing to change or risk losing the woman I loved.

After reading *The Wisdom of Menopause* by Dr Christiane Northrup, I understood that I wasn't abnormal and hadn't fallen out of love with my partner. It was obvious I was experiencing perimenopause and had every symptom in the book.

Perimenopause can last up to 15 years in the lead up to menopause (when periods finally stop). Women who have intact ovaries experience declining oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone levels which can create hormonal imbalance. A visit to my GP and a blood test confirmed my low hormone levels, especially testosterone.

I started taking Prempak-C, a synthetic form of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT). While it reduced my hot flushes and made me calmer, it did nothing to restore my libido. It wasn't until I was prescribed bio-identical HRT in the form of oestrogen patches, a progesterone pill and testosterone gel, that my health and our relationship finally improved.

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It was the addition of testosterone that made all the difference. Although there is no licenced testosterone therapy for women, some doctors recognise how important testosterone is to women's wellbeing and prescribe it for menopausal women with low levels. My depression and irritability lifted, energy and confidence increased and I felt more positive about life than I had in years. I only wish I'd sought help sooner.

With my partner there were subtle changes at first. I became more affectionate, touching her and delighting in the softness of her skin. We slow danced in the kitchen after dinner and enjoyed long kisses. I wanted to be hugged and enjoyed being touched.

The feelings of panic around intimacy lifted and within a month my libido returned. Vaginal dryness was a thing of the past. My desire for my partner was rekindled and we went back to sharing a bed. It was as if I was falling in love all over again. Sex became enjoyable and I found myself taking the initiative and being more active than I had been in years. I felt reconnected with my sexuality and, most importantly, with my partner.

It took a year before my hormone balance was finally restored. While HRT may not be suitable for everyone, it's given me back my mojo and saved our relationship. So, here's to our next 20 years together. 🍷