

# Has Coronavirus anxiety affected your sex drive? You're not alone

The COVID-19 effect that no one's talking about.



BY SARA MACAULEY  
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From our ability to concentrate on our favourite Netflix series, to the effect on our dating lives, job security and finances – almost every aspect of normal life has been turned upside down by the Coronavirus pandemic. As well as worries about our own health and that of our loved ones, the pandemic has had a huge effect on many people's sex drives, thanks to an increase in stress levels and worsening mental health.

And is it any wonder? The Office for National Statistics recently published a report which found that twice as many adults in the UK are experiencing symptoms of depression now, compared with this time last year. Almost 20% of people met the criteria for depression in June 2020 compared with just under 10% between July 2019 and March 2020 – an unsurprising fact, all things considered, but one that has far-reaching consequences.

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A well known side-effect of stress, anxiety and exhaustion, cited by the NHS and many experts, is a major impact on our happiness, including our sex drives.

“The pandemic has impacted people in different ways. Some have struggled with mental health due to sudden changes in routine, health anxieties, changes in how they experience their relationship and in their own self esteem and confidence. Stress and anxiety often affects our relationships as we can be less emotionally available to partners, which can affect the connection for both people,” says sex & relationship psychotherapist [Miranda Christophers](#).

If you've noticed your libido plummet during the pandemic, you're not alone. “Stress and anxiety changes our emotional state. Some people notice an increase in desire when stressed or worried, but the vast majority will report a decrease,” according to Christophers.

Alice\*, 26, found that her sex drive took a nosedive at the beginning of lockdown, telling Glamour: “When lockdown first started, my partner and I couldn't go to work, so we were both constantly in the house with our young child. It was stressful because we were both on parenting duty while also worrying about money, health and job security. It really affected our sex life because we were seeing each other 24/7 every day, which lead to tension and minor arguments. We spent every moment thinking about everything other than sex, and when we did have a moment alone together, I just wasn't in the mood.”

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Alice's situation isn't uncommon, as dating and relationships coach [Kate Mansfield](#) explains: “stress relating to financial concerns, career uncertainty and anxiety about the future all results in a lot of people feeling worried about how little control we really have – and this just isn't sexy.”

The number of people on UK payrolls has fallen by 730,000 between March and July, resulting in unemployment rates at an all time high, with many still on furlough. This cocktail of anxiety, financial concerns and job hunting has left little room for sexual desire. As well as this, the nature of coronavirus has had a huge psychological impact on our desire for intimacy: be that touching, hugging or having sex. According to Mansfield, “the most impactful aspect of stress specific to this pandemic when it comes to getting physically intimate is perhaps a deep seated fear of catching it, or passing it on to others.”

While this may be a more pertinent worry for those dating during the era of coronavirus, it affects those in relationships as well. “As much as we might logically know that we are safe if we have been isolating with someone, there is now a kind of conditioned response to avoid close contact, which is likely affecting most people at a subconscious level,” she says.

For Louise\*, 28, avidly watching the news has derailed her sex life with her partner: “Waking up every morning and not knowing what's going to happen in the news has put a massive strain on things sexually with my partner and I. We both have very vulnerable family members and worrying about their health, rising statistics and the chance of another lockdown is causing us massive anxiety and leaving little time for intimacy.”

All hope isn't lost, though – according to Christophers, the key to working through the pandemic's effect on desire is thinking about what was previously present when we last experienced it.

“Think of it like a pot of desire that requires certain ingredients. For example: to have a good connection with a partner, flirtation, to feel desired and not feeling stressed or tired. When we understand what helps to create desire, we can start to work on the individual ingredients.”

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As lockdown restrictions ease, we're all feeling varying degrees of anxiety about the current situation. Whether you're comfortable going out for a romantic meal or prefer staying in the house, it's important to make time for your partner, says Mansfield: “Use this time to build health and wellbeing into your daily structure. Focus on mutual support, emotional connection and finding small ways to enjoy and appreciate the basics of life: get out in nature, eat and cook good food together. The closeness will ease anxiety and will start to translate into physical intimacy, but don't force things. Talk about your feelings openly and be there for each other.”

Open and honest communication is what has helped Alice improve her sex life: “ I was quite embarrassed that I never wanted to have sex, even though there were so many things impacting that, and I could tell my partner was getting quite confused about it. When I brought it up, there were obviously some wires crossed. He had thought I didn't find him attractive anymore, but when I explained, he was a lot more understanding and was relieved.”

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A lack of desire equating to loss of attraction is a common misconception amongst couples, and Mansfield suggests using “I” language to avoid one party feeling rejected during a decrease in sexual intimacy. “Approach the situation from a place of positivity, for example, by saying “I really love you and I want us to have an amazing sex life. It feels like we've lost the spark a little, are you on board with me to see how we can get it back?”. Never accuse or blame. Be brave and have an intention of teamwork.”

Christopher says paying attention to what makes us tick has a part to play, too. “Reminding yourself of what you like, enjoy and are attracted to may also help. Think about how you can break what has become the normal routine - make some time to relax with your partner, during which you can be more playful, romantic or sexy.”

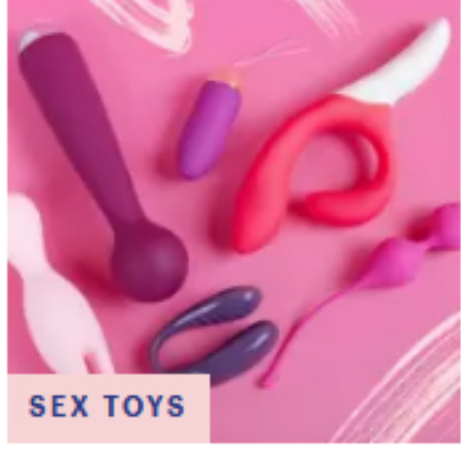
Spending time thinking about what makes us feel good can help us reconnect with our sexual side. Maybe it's taking the time to explore our own bodies, wearing something that makes us feel sexy or treating ourselves to a bath with some atmospheric music – whatever helps ignite a spark is valid. The pandemic has hit us all hard, and a lack of desire is a totally natural response to an event of this magnitude. Being patient with ourselves and our partners, speaking honestly and giving ourselves a break is key to rebuilding intimacy.

\*Names have been changed.

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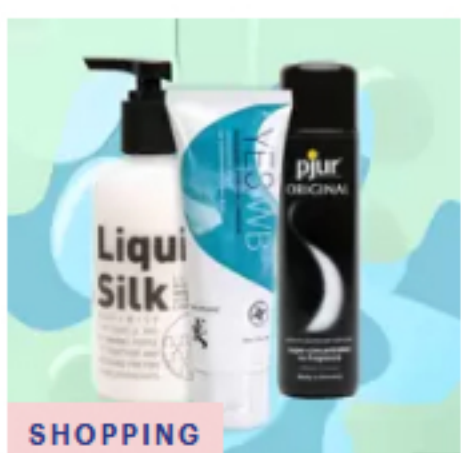


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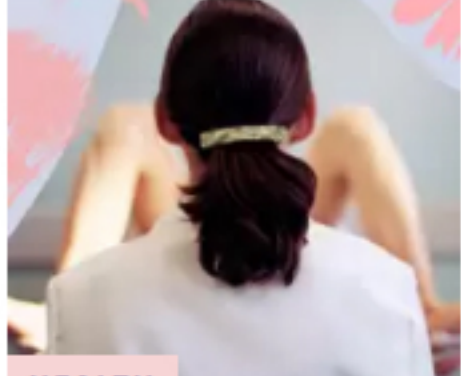


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