

Ep #16: ED: Partner's Sexual Difficulties



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With Your Host

Dr. Sonia Wright

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Welcome to the Midlife Sex Coach for Women Podcast, the only show that combines a fun personality, medical knowledge, sexual counseling and life coaching together. To create unique sex coaching that helps busy women awaken their libidos, address intimacy issues and learn how to express their sexuality for the rest of their days. Here is your host, certified life coach and sexual counselor, Dr. Sonia Wright.

Hello Diamonds, I hope you are all doing well. I am so excited to bring you this podcast topic to you today because it's one of my most requested topics. A couple weeks ago I asked listeners to submit topics that they wanted me to address on the podcast.

And first of all I want to take a second to thank all of you for the requests that I've received; keep them coming in. Any questions that you have, any issue that you want me to address please just send me an email and I will put it on my list of topics to address on the podcast, so thank you.

So one of the topics that I got requested and I actually got requested from several different women. The issue that I got requested is to address the issue of how women begin to cope with their male partner's erectile dysfunction. So while we are going to be talking about erectile dysfunction, I just want to let you know that really the majority of this podcast can be applied to any situation that a woman is dealing with in terms of their partner's sexual issues. Whether the partner is a man or a woman or a non-binary.

If your partner's having sexual difficulties it's going to affect you. So when you hear me say erectile dysfunction, if you are dealing with your partner's sexual issue just substitute whatever that sexual issue is in where I'm talking about erectile dysfunction, okay?

Alrighty. So now we are going to go back to erectile dysfunction. Let's do this. Let's talk about erectile dysfunction. During this podcast I'm mainly

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going to be saying ED when I'm referring to erectile dysfunction, okay? So, erectile dysfunction is the inability of a man to maintain a penile erection which is sufficient for satisfying sexual activity. So the Mayo Clinic says that ED is a difficulty of getting an erection and sustaining that erection. There could be several underlying causes for ED, and they could be physiological and / or psychological in nature.

Even if you start with just physiological issues, usually the psychological component gets added in there at some point in time. If we are looking at causes, then heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, as well as depression and anxiety and stress, all of these things are linked to or are associated or cause erectile dysfunction.

So, because of this, it's important that men dealing with erectile dysfunction talk to their primary care physician or they talk to a urologist. If you or your partner think that there's a psychological component involved with the ED, then consulting with a sexual counselor or a sexual therapist is also something that is really important.

Alright, having said that, there's also a lot of really good books out there for erectile dysfunction that you might want to look up. One of my favorites is Barry McCarthy's *Coping with Erectile Dysfunction* and then there's also *The Penis Book* by Aaron Spitz. And we'll put both of those information in the show notes, okay?

So let's get back to the women. So women have told me several different scenarios as to how their partner's dealing with the issue of erectile dysfunction. Initially, the male partner may be in denial about the situation, and hoping that it just goes away. And that actually delays treatment and delays addressing the situation. Some partners remain in that state of denial and sexual intimacy just decreases and decreases over time.

Other male partners have a fatalistic attitude about this and they just end sexual intimacy all together in the relationship. They just kind of close-up shop. Some men go out and get prescriptions for medications. But the

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medications don't solve the issue for everyone and at best it only treats the symptoms of erectile dysfunction. These medications don't treat the underlying health issues that are causing the ED. And usually these health issues continue to compound over time.

So I'm going to reiterate again that it's important to talk to your primary care physician or your urologist or your sexual therapist or your counselor, to get the help that he needs. But what I actually want to spend the majority of this time on this podcast today is addressing how women are dealing with their partners' erectile dysfunction. So many women are suffering in silence around this issue. They tell me that they are really frustrated and they don't know what to do.

Often the women come to me and they tell me that they are frustrated because their male partners are not proactively addressing this issue. Or maybe the couple has tried a lot of different approaches and they really just don't know what to do next. Not a lot is written about the issue of ED as it relates to the women's perspective. Except to say that women should be supportive, right?

Society says that women are supposed to be understanding, that women are supposed to help their male partners feel better about the situation. Women are supposed to suggest that their partner go see a doctor and to be encouraging to their partner. But what do you do if all these suggestions are not being heard?

Honestly we don't know what is going on in our partners' minds. They are probably having a lot of thoughts. Let's look for a second at, "Society seems to define a man in terms of his ability to financially support himself and his family. And also in his ability to perform sexually." So while the female partner may just see it as a problem that needs to be addressed, the ED just needs to be addressed, the male partner may be interpreting their issues as a fight for his identity. For his vitality as a man. For the essence of his manhood.

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He may be seeing it as the beginning of the end. And if you are seeing something as the beginning of the end, or the tip of the health iceberg, you don't really want to go to talk to anybody about this. It may be very hard for him to go see a doctor if he's thinking that his identity of a man is being threatened. This might be all too much for him.

Or maybe your partner is hoping that, "If I just ignore it it's going to get better on its own. Maybe it's like a temporary thing." If it's temporary, he's not going to have to deal with the health issues and he's not going to have to deal with his changing self-perception as a man. But when all of this is going on with the partner, the women is also suffering here.

And you know what? There's like no acknowledgements by society that ED is affecting the woman as much as it's affecting the man. The woman is in a great deal of emotional pain. She's feeling anger and frustration and sadness. And you know what? There's really like very few safe spaces for her to go to process her emotions to talk about what's going on with her. I want to create that safe place for you right now.

The first thing that I want to talk about, and the first thing that I want to acknowledge is that a loss has occurred. It's a loss, it's a real loss. It's a loss of intimate touch, it's a loss of connection, it's a loss of pleasure. The woman may be mourning the loss of her once vibrant, amazing sex life. But she's often forced to mourn in silence because society doesn't acknowledge her pain.

Well not anymore, no. Not anymore. It's time to shine a light on this issue. It's really time to talk about this. It's time to give yourself permission. If you are dealing with your partner's ED or any partner's sexual dysfunction, give yourself permission to mourn. Give yourself permission to acknowledge the loss. Give yourself permission to feel all the emotions that have been kind of bottled up inside of you.

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Write them all down. Process them. Acknowledge them. The truth is that the sexual intimacy in your life has changed and honestly it may never get back to the way it was before.

It may have changed and maybe you can't go back at all. So take the time that you need to process. Process the feelings. Process the thoughts. Process the loss. And when you're ready, after you process the loss, let's look at something else that a lot of female partners are doing. And this is blame.

Women tend to blame themselves for their partners' ED. And they blame themselves for the subsequent loss of interest in sex. And first you're like, "What? Why? What does that have to do with anything, right?"

But women have a tendency to interpret their partners' lack of interest as something wrong with themselves. They see their partners' lack of interest as rejection, and they start thinking to themselves, "I'm not sexy enough. I'm not young enough. I'm not pretty enough. My body isn't perky like it used to be. If I could change, if I could be sexier, if I could be younger, if I could be prettier, if I didn't have pendulous breasts." Whatever it is, they go to that place where it's about them. That they've done something wrong.

Essentially they are making it mean that they're not worthy. That they're not loveable. Somewhere in their minds they are thinking if they were prettier, if they were sexier, if they were thinner, then their partner would be attracted to them. Then the sexual arousal would be stronger and there would be a firmer erection.

But you know what women? You need to really understand that this has absolutely nothing to do with you. This is your partner's situation and you did not cause this situation. So if you are finding self-blame in this situation, replace it with self-compassion. Replace it with self-love. Write down all those thoughts you are thinking in terms of you're to blame for this situation. Sometimes we have those thoughts in our minds but we

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are not really acknowledging them but they are staying there and they are affecting you.

So write down all those thoughts. If you feel like there's something wrong with you and this is causing the erectile dysfunction then write down those thoughts. And really recognize that you are not responsible. The fact that your partner's penis is not gaining or maintaining an erection is your partner's situation or circumstance. And I'm going to go even farther with this, in fact, if we break this down ED is just a neutral circumstance. It's neither good nor bad.

I know, I know; just stay with me for a minute on this one. It's actually neutral because some women are glad that their partner having erectile issues and they don't have to engage in penetrative sex anymore. While other women are feeling like this is a very distressing situation.

So you have this one situation of erectile dysfunction and you have a set of people that are like, "Okay, well, guess we are not engaging in sex anymore, that's okay with me." And then you have another set of women that are very upset about the situation.

So ED is just a neutral circumstance. So basically there's the ED and then there are all the thoughts on both sides about the ED. And you know what? You honestly get to decide what you want to think about this situation. So let's take some time to look at the thoughts. Let's take some time to look at your thoughts. All the different thoughts.

So first write down all your initial thoughts about ED and the lack of sexual intimacy in your life. Thoughts about the frequency and how that's decreased. Thoughts about how the pleasure's missing. Possibly thoughts about blaming yourself. Maybe thoughts about being frustrated by your partner's lack of action. Whatever it is, just acknowledge all the thoughts, write them all down and sit with them.

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And recognize that the thoughts don't necessarily need to change. You can ask yourself "Are these thoughts serving you?" But they don't specifically have to change at this moment. You don't have to rush to change anything.

Well actually there is one thing that you might need to change. And that is your resistance to the situation. You didn't cause the situation and you can't make your partner change their actions. You can't specifically change the situation, at least not at this moment but what you can do is stop being resistant to the situation and work on acceptance or allowing the situation.

Yeah. You are not responsible for this situation, but you do need to accept the situation as it is right now. Especially if you want to eventually deal with this situation. What is that saying? Like fighting against reality that you will lose about 100% of the time, right? So this is where you decide what you want to think about the situation. And possibly what you want to do about the situation.

So what do you want to think? Do you want to continue to be in resistance? Or do you want to allow the situation? Because the situation is happening. You can push against it and deny it and be angry about it. But the situation is still there and it hasn't changed. So what do you want to think? The choice is yours.

And you know what, often when I'm not certain what I want to think, I just go straight to the feeling. I'm like what is the feeling that I want to have in this situation? And then I kind of work it back from there and I figure out what my thoughts are, associated with the feeling. So if you want to feel hopeful about the situation, then the question to yourself is what thoughts do you need in order to feel hopeful? What thoughts do you need if you want to feel effective or realistic? Right?

Maybe a thought like there's an ebb and a flow to ED and we just need to figure out how to work with it. We just need to how to figure out how to create that sexual intimacy with the ebb and the flow of ED. So once you

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have the feeling and the thoughts that you want, then you can focus on the actions that you want to take. Let's look at the actions for a second.

Maybe it's having that difficult conversation. You know what? That conversation that I mentioned back in episode eight, maybe it's about having that difficult conversation and it's time. Maybe it's about revisiting the urologist. Maybe it's about bringing toys to the bedroom including a strap-on dildo.

But whatever you decide, it's really going to be really important to preserve that intimate touch and that communication that you have between the two of you while you're figuring this out. I'm going to repeat that because I think it's important to understand. Maintain and preserve the intimate touch and keep the communication going. These are key to making sure that this is working out well for you. You need to focus on working on this as a team.

And before I end this podcast please know that you get to define the sexual intimacy for you as a couple. While you're figuring this all out, you can also take the time to figure out what sexual intimacy looks like for you without penetrative sex.

Always remember that you get to define the sexual intimacy in your life. You get to figure out what it looks like. You don't have to give it up just because penetrative sex is not there. You don't have to adhere to society's limited views on sexual intimacy being penetrative sex alone.

You really get to decide what you want your amazing sex life to look like for you. And that can be without penetrative sex, right? You get to get creative, and you get to have lots of fun with this.

Okay Diamonds, there you have it. Let me summarize for a second. When dealing with your partner's sexual dysfunctions, such as erectile dysfunction, or ED, take the time to grieve the loss of your past sexual intimacy. Stop blaming yourself and have compassion for yourself. Work on accepting the current situation. Understand that your partner's responsible

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for dealing with their issues and that you also can't force a person to do something that they don't want to do.

But you do need to accept what's happening at this moment. Ask yourself what you want to think and do in this situation. Remember to preserve the intimate touch and the communication, keep that going. And then finally remember that you get to define sexual intimacy for yourself.

And one last note; don't give up. Keep working on it. Keep talking. Keep figuring it out. Okay Diamonds, that's what I have for you this week.

To celebrate the launch of the Midlife Sex Coach for Women Podcast I'm going to be giving away a \$50 Amazon gift card to five lucky listeners who subscribe, rate, and review the show on Apple Podcast. It doesn't have to be a five-star review, although I would really love it if it were a five-star review, but more importantly I want your honest feedback so I can create an amazing show that provides tons of value.

Visit www.soniawrightmd.com/podcastlaunch to learn more about the contest and how you can enter. I'll be announcing the winners on the show in an upcoming episode.

Okay, that's all for now, see you next time Diamonds.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of the Midlife Sex Coach for Women Podcast. If you enjoy Dr. Sonia's fun and caring approach to sexual intimacy, head to soniawrightmd.com to learn more.