Dear Curious,

Sexual apathy takes different forms and may occur when someone doesn't feel close or intimate to his or her partner. Sexual apathy (aka, sexual aversion, hypoactive sexual desire, or inhibited sexual desire) is a common sexual disorder characterized by a low level of interest in sex, according to the National Institutes of Health. A person with primary sexual apathy may never have had sexual desire or interest, whereas a person who experiences secondary sexual apathy may have had sexual desire in the past, but not currently. Some people may not have interest in having sex with her/his partner, while another may not have interest in sex generally. In some cases, an individual may believe that her/his partner is sexually apathetic, but it may just be that their libidos are different.

Nevertheless, keep in mind that the range of sexual interest and sexual expression among humans varies widely. Some people who have a low or no sex drive may identify as asexual and not consider this to be a problem. While low/no sex drive may be characterized as a disorder by some in the health care community and by those who are concerned with their partner's (or their own) low sex drive, having a low (or no) sex drive feels fine for some people. While some may choose to seek treatment for their low sex drive, others may feel completely comfortable with a low sex drive and may not choose to seek help.

Alone, the term "apathy" means indifference or boredom, but "sexual apathy" does not necessarily imply that someone is bored or indifferent to sex. According to the University of Maryland Medical Center, a range of physical and/or psychological factors may contribute to sexual apathy, including:
• Strict upbringing
• Insomnia
• Depression
• Stress
• Hormonal changes
• Some illnesses
• Some medications

List adapted from *Inhibited Sexual Desire — Overview* [4] from the University of Maryland Medical Center.

If you feel that you or your partner may be sexually apathetic and it causes personal distress and/or affects your relationship, it may be helpful to discuss this with your partner and explore steps that you can take together — or apart — to understand what may be going on. Depending on personal circumstances, choosing to treat sexual apathy may be an option. A variety of therapies, including exercise, finding ways to better cope with stress, strengthening pelvic muscles, and/or treating underlying medical causes may be helpful for those with sexual apathy. Tips to improve sexual intimacy between partners include:

• Communicating with your partner in an open and honest way
• Seeking counseling
• Setting aside time for intimacy
• Adding a little spice to your sex life, i.e., try a different position, time of day, and/or location for sex (FYI, check out Relationship rev-up [5] in the Go Ask Alice! Relationships archives for some zesty ideas!)

List adapted from *Low Sex Drive in Women* [6] from the Mayo Clinic.

You and your partner may also decide to discuss this issue with a health care provider. You may also look to talk about this further with a mental health professional individually or with your partner as well (in couples counseling).

Communication, support, and treatment (depending on personal circumstances) may help determine whether sexual apathy is a concern and whether to pursue care or treatment. Understanding that sexual desire ranges from person to person may also help a person feel more comfortable with their own (and their partners’) sex drive.

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Published date:
Oct 23, 2009

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