

# Let's Talk About Sex

If you want to get physical, you've got to clock your chemicals

By **Dr. Renee Young**

**R**emember when you could just think about getting busy and your body would respond like a supercharged V8? Ah, good times. But just like our ability to live on Red Bull and gummy bears, some things change with age.

If you want to keep exploring the rhythm of the night, you've got to understand the chemistry that makes your body talk. I'm not talking about who you love; I'm talking about how much you sex you want.

As a hormone expert, I view desire and intimacy through the lens of chemistry. Who we are attracted to, how often we feel desire, and how those drives shift across our lifespan are largely dictated by a complex "cocktail" of hormones and neurotransmitters. And while sex is undeniably an emotional and physical experience, it's largely driven by chemical messengers.

Turns out, your midlife libido isn't just a victim of time; it's being hijacked by a great hormonal conspiracy. So, let's dive into the chemicals that make your body talk.

## Just can't get it up?

Testosterone, the "boom boom" hormone, is the real MVP of your metabolic team—for women and men alike. Think of the Big T as that friend who showed up at your crappy college apartment at 2 a.m. on a Tuesday with a six-pack and the address of some party way across town.

**Good idea? No. Good time? Absolutely.**

So when your testosterone tanks, both men and women experience what I call the sad trifecta: decreased libido, muscle turning to mush, and energy that's more sloth than sexpot. The kicker? Men's testosterone levels decrease by 1% every year after 30. And by the time they hit menopause, women's testosterone will have decreased by about 50%.

**If this sounds familiar, consider getting your testosterone levels checked. You want someone to wake you up before your go-gonads go.**



## Girls just want to have (sexual) function

For women, the hormone situation is like a complicated dance routine—lots of estrogen, some testosterone, trying to work together without stepping on each other's toes. Estrogen keeps things running smoothly (and I mean that literally—lubrication, people), and when it peaks during ovulation, desire often tags along for the ride.

But here comes progesterone, the hormonal equivalent of your mom coming home early from vacation and shutting down your illicit house party. It shows up during the second half of your menstrual cycle and basically tells your libido to simmer down.

When perimenopause hits and estrogen falls off the dreaded cliff, it's not uncommon to want to throw yourself off with it. Hot flashes, shitty sleep, brain fog, mood swings—not what anyone would call a cocktail of aphrodisiacs, much less a fun ride through your second half of life.

Ladies, find yourself a doctor knowledgeable in menopausal hormone therapy (MHT), which is the modern term for what was previously called hormone replacement therapy (HRT). Your lady bits—and your partner—will thank you for it.



*(Editor's note: The first Geezer reader to write in with the correct number of '80s song references in this article gets a free Geezer tote bag! Send your guess to hello@geezermagazine.com.)*

## Bad for the bone

When it comes to sex, chemistry can work against you.

When you're under stress, your body

pumps out cortisol, the ultimate cock block/clam jam. It suppresses the very hormones you need for intimacy. Suddenly sex feels like another item on your to-do list, somewhere between "organize garage" and "get that weird bump checked."

Middle age is a bona fide pressure cooker, so if you're looking to reconnect with your partner, start by finding ways to diffuse a few stress bombs in their life.

## Golden years

If you need one more reason to keep dancing in the sheets, here you go: Getting it on can actually protect your brain and keep those happy hormones flowing well into your golden years. It's like the "use it or lose it" principle, but way more fun than doing crossword puzzles.

So, friends, take heart. Losing your mojo is often hormonal. Find a doc if you need to, but know that with the right chemical makeup, you can definitely get your groove back. **GZR**

*Dr. Renee Young is a pioneering naturopathic doctor and founder of the Young Naturopathic Center for Wellness in Los Gatos, California. She lives in the Santa Cruz mountains with her husband, son, German Shepherd, and way too many chickens.*

## Head over feels

Let's not forget that before anything happens downtown, your brain is lighting up like a pinball machine.

Dopamine creates that "I want" feeling. Yep, the same hormone that drives your Netflix binges can also make sex potentially addictive. Serotonin, meanwhile, is a "feel good" chemical and a key contributor to orgasms for both women and men. Take note, though: Too much serotonin can bog down your sex drive, which is why sexual dysfunction is a common side effect of certain antidepressants.

## Relax (you did it)

Post-coital bliss isn't just in your head. Oxytocin, the "cuddle hormone," floods your system during orgasm, leaving you with the "we should do this again" feeling. Meanwhile, endorphins, aka "nature's morphine," come when you do, reducing stress and creating a sense of euphoria.

Then there's prolactin—the "I'm done" signal. Released after climax, it brings on relaxation and contentment. Fun fact: When combined with oxytocin, prolactin is responsible for the famous male refractory period, also known as "mandatory nap time." Women, however, don't have the same drowsiness-inducing prolactin surge.