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“MY WIFE AND I are partners, lovers and best friends. We’re very happy and assume we understand each other sexually, but . . .” John pauses. “Because I’m a man, Beth thinks I’m always ready for action. Whenever I give her a hug or a kiss, she thinks I want sex. Most times I’m just showing affection—and maybe I want some affection too. But if she’s not in the mood, she moves away, gets kind of cold. So I stay away from her for a few days, and next thing you know, she’s complaining that I’m not affectionate enough!”

Many wives make false assumptions about their husbands’ wants and needs. Why? Because men do not like to talk about such things for fear of being thought less masculine, less sexy, less potent than other men. But these needs, if not brought into the open, can come between even the most loving couples. Here are five sex secrets men hesitate to share with their wives.

1. *Men do not have a greater sex drive than women do.* Many women believe that men can never “get enough”—an idea probably based on their experiences as teen-agers, when the boys they knew seemed preoccupied with sex. “During adolescence, men usually *do* want sex—and think about sex—more frequently than women do,” says Dr. Charles T. Clegg, a psychiatrist in Century City, Calif. “Many young men expect to meet their emotional needs through sex.” But as males mature, they begin to dis-

tinguish between sexual and emotional needs. What’s more, age and the responsibilities of work and family tend to impinge on the sex drive. As Dr. Charles E. Flowers, Jr., professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, points out, “Men do not have a greater sex

KATHLEEN MCCOY

Five Sex Secrets Men Wish Wives Knew

Key revelations
that can enhance the
quality of every
loving marriage

Condensed from REDBOOK

FIVE SEX SECRETS MEN WISH WIVES KNEW

drive than women do. Some men have a high level of desire, others have very little—and the same is true for women. Individuals differ.”

Barry J. Levine, a Los Angeles-area psychotherapist, has found that among married couples who have incompatible levels of sexual desire, it is often the husband who has the lower sex drive, and age is frequently a factor. “Men tend to feel a surge of sexual energy in their late teens,” he says, “while women are most interested in sex in their late thirties and early forties.”

What can a husband and wife do if they have differing levels of sexual desire? Loving communication, with understanding rather than criticism, is vital. So is offering each other plenty of physical affection, whether or not it leads to sex—and taking time to unwind after a busy day. “Many men and women, tired and tense from the demands of work and child care, need to relax before they can even think of having sex,” says Bernie Zilbergeld, a clinical psychologist in Oakland, Calif. “One of my clients, a healthy young man, had low sexual desire. But sex with his wife improved dramatically when the couple tried sitting in bed and talking for an hour before making love. The longer they talked, the more he began to relax and feel a renewed desire for sex.”

2. *Men do not want “just one thing.”* The misconception that men have a one-dimensional view of physical affection may also date from the teen years. But the mature

man is less likely to try to prove himself through sexual performance and more likely to want communication on a number of levels.

“Sometimes all a man wants is a hug, a kiss or conversation,” says Zilbergeld. “Physical affection that does not lead to intercourse is an important part of an intimate relationship.” Levine agrees: “A man needs to feel significant to his partner. Simply having sexual intercourse is not enough for most men.”

If nonsexual physical closeness has not been a major part of a couple’s life, the woman should talk to her husband about it. He, in turn, may reveal a secret longing to express tenderness in physical ways that don’t necessarily lead to sex.

3. *Love is an important factor in male sexual pleasure.* Not all men agree with this. Yet many say that love does make a crucial difference. “With my wife I feel safe, accepted and loved,” says Tom, 35, married six years. “To share yourself with someone who really knows you—and loves you anyway—is a whole different experience.”

Says Levine, “Men tend to be very much like women in that the more emotionally involved they are, the more intense their physical satisfaction.”

4. *Men need foreplay too.* “I wish my wife knew that I can’t always perform on command,” says Kevin, a 29-year-old engineer married for three years, “and that it’s not because I don’t want to or because she’s unattractive.” The myth of

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constant male readiness, which frequently causes serious misunderstandings between men and women, is perpetuated by erotic literature. "When it doesn't happen that way in real life," says Zilbergeld, "women worry about their attractiveness and men worry about their virility."

In fact, men crave foreplay as much as women do—even though they may be reluctant to say so. "Sometimes I feel cheated," says Roger, 32, married eight years. "My wife assumes I don't need any carressing. I want to feel pampered and loved, to be touched and kissed. But it's difficult to ask for this."

5. *Men do not always want to initiate sex.* "I wish every woman could understand that *most* men are excited by a woman's loving, tender assertiveness in bed," says Dr. Flowers. "It is likely to make him feel cherished and desired—and make him want her even more."

A recent study by Donald L. Mosher, professor of psychology at the University of Connecticut, and a colleague, Mark Sirkin, confirmed that men react positively to women's sexual assertiveness. In the experiment, 138 college men imagined four sexual encounters. In two encounters either the man or woman was assertive, while in the other two the partners took turns. The researchers found that the old macho ideal of the male who always takes the lead was *least* ap-

pealing to the respondents. They were most intrigued by the idea of taking turns. Mosher concludes that men welcome a woman's sexual initiative, partly because it makes them feel more desirable and partly because they relish being relieved of the sole responsibility for sexual overtures and decisions.

Many women hesitate to initiate sex because they are fearful of putting pressure on their husbands, or worry about being rejected. When you take the risk of initiating sex, you face the same possibility of rejection that men have always faced. "A lot of women expect to be accepted when they are the initiator," says Zilbergeld. "But a man, just like a woman, sometimes needs to say no."

COMMUNICATION is the key to understanding a man's sex secrets. If you tell each other what you most enjoy about lovemaking, you'll be taking the most important step toward dispelling old myths and experiencing new closeness and pleasure.

We all need to hear words of thanks, support and love, both in and out of the bedroom. This, along with an understanding of the many ways that men and women are alike, can add immeasurably to the joy of sharing our lives.

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