

# Losing my libido

## Body Language

Shani Raviv

I lost my libido and didn't know where to find it. I know when I lost it and why. But the sad thing was that I didn't miss it. If my partner hadn't warned me that it was gone I wouldn't even have known.

It's not that I made any conscious decision to be celibate or chaste nor did I choose an asexual existence. It was more a case of waking up one day with numb genitalia and amnesia as to why this was so.

There was a vague, mental sexual nostalgia but my reproductive organs were "lobotomised". If my sex drive ran on batteries I would definitely have said they were flat.

About a month before it happened, I was prescribed a daily dose of fluoxetine hydrochloride, which is a selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI). It is an antidepressant, which inhibits the neuronal uptake of serotonin in the central nervous system.

Later, after realising I had lost my libido, I referred to the leaflet inside my box of antidepressants and under the heading "Side effects and special precautions" was the sub-heading "Nervous system", followed by a list: headaches, nervousness, insomnia, drowsiness, anxiety, tremor, dizziness, agitation — pretty much everything I'm used to.

The words "decreased libido" were stuck between the words "fatigue" and "abnormal dreams" as though it were a minor inconvenience.

According to statistics on the net, however, only 11% of people on antidepressants experience sexual dysfunction as a side effect.



**If the world's population was prescribed this same treatment would it lead to the extinction of the human race?** Photograph: Shani Raviv

Of course I was one of them.

It also said, "Fluoxetine may cause incidences of untoward sexual experiences." What a lame euphemism for zero sex drive!

For weeks I didn't want sex or *gaf-foofelling*, as my Greek friend likes to call foreplay, or any physical or intimate contact with my guy.

I only realised later that my insensitiveness made any loving or lustful contact unwanted. And any woman who has been sexually active when she was not feeling it will know that she felt violated. So no, it was not as liberating to have lost my libido as one might think.

If you are single, don't think the obvious lack of desire — that may strip your life of the base chase, the trivial flirtations and futile fantasies — will set you free.

And if you have a partner, don't be duped into thinking the constant rejection of your loved one will not land both of you in long-term couples therapy or cast each of you off to singledom.

Losing my libido was actually quite disempowering. A huge part of my womanhood went missing. You

may think that a mentally stable asexual is better than a depressed nymphomaniac or horny but suicidal monogamist — but it's a toss-up really.

There is no medical term for female impotence but this is the closest we, as women, will come. This is drug-induced frigidity. Because it's not that you want to, but can't. It's that you don't want to, but can.

Unfortunately, we don't have prominent erections to prove it. But if, like men, we were endowed with genitalia that could visibly display non-responsiveness to certain stimuli, we would be seriously concerned about the plight of our private parts.

We would probably be frantically calling up sex clinics on the sly and wondering how to purchase the likes of Viagra without the embarrassment. We would definitely be questioning our wilting womanhood.

As a woman, however, I can tell you that I did nothing of the sort. First I went into denial. Then I bitched. Then I had a temper tantrum. Then I blamed the world.

Was I an unwilling recruit to this

century's counter-revolution to the Sixties flower power generation? What if the world's population was prescribed this same treatment — would it lead to the extinction of the human race? So I plotted a coup in lieu of the meltdown of humanity.

I would put up notices at pharmacies akin to missing person pamphlets: "Wanted: lost libido — will pay big bucks!" Or a column in the classifieds: "Young woman looks for missing libido — the reward is helping to find it."

I would sue the pharmaceutical companies for depriving womankind of our feminine rights to pleasure. I would make it my life's mission to find the antidote to antidepressants — an "anti-antidepressant" and patent it.

Or I could just take the risk and stop the medication — after consulting the psychiatrist, that is.

The point is, if you were sufficiently in your "right mind" on the antidepressant to be able to grieve for your deceased libido, you would be so depressed about having lost it in the first place that you would get depressed all over again and would need an even stronger antidepressant to combat your new bout of depression.

So it's probably better that you don't know until you do.

Soon after I went off the medication, my libido returned like a faithful friend with compunction and the desire to make up for it.

I was pleased, though, that despite all the heinous side effects, like insomnia or grinding my teeth at night when I did sleep, there was one big bonus.

According to the website Estro-naut, a forum for women's health, I experienced a rare side effect that only happens to 1 in 1 000 women — breast enlargement.

My partner has not stopped calling me Dolly.