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Menopause hard on couple's sex lives

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NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - When a woman enters menopause, her sex life and that of her partner may suffer, according to a survey in which more than half of the women reported a decrease in sex drive and in the amount of sex they were having since entering menopause.

Overall, 46 percent of menopausal women surveyed reported having sex less than once per month and most women felt that this was hurting their relationship.

"Menopausal women are having less sex and it's impacting our relationships," Karen Giblin noted in a telephone interview with Reuters Health. "Frankly, through the Red Hot Mamas menopause education programs, I have heard that a lot of women would rather go shoe shopping than have sex, and that concerns me."

The survey, including more than 1,000 women, 35 years or older, who were just beginning, just ending, or in the middle of menopause, was conducted between June 20 and July 2, 2007.

"We are the baby-boom generation who is now entering menopause; we are the women who lived through the sexual revolution in the 60s and now we are having our own sexual revolution, of a different kind," said Giblin, the founder of the Red Hot Mamas organization (www.redhotmamas.org), which commissioned the Sex and Menopause Survey. The survey was sponsored by Duramed Pharmaceuticals and conducted by Harris Interactive.

Four hundred sixty nine of these women -- about 44 percent -- reported suffering from vaginal symptoms such as vaginal atrophy (vaginal narrowing or shrinkage), which can cause vaginal dryness and painful sex.

Eighty-eight percent of women experiencing vaginal atrophy said it was causing them problems and 47 percent said that they have avoided, made an excuse, or stopped having sex altogether because of physical

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discomfort during intercourse.

Vaginal dryness, in particular, plagued more than half of menopausal women surveyed and this resulted in two thirds of them having less sex. "Seventy percent of the women did not know that therapies are available to relieve vaginal dryness," Giblin noted.

"There are over-the-counter products to combat dryness and your physician has a treasure chest of prescription medications to relieve vaginal dryness," she added.

Giblin believes men need menopause education just as much as women. "It's not only important that a woman have a thorough understanding of the menopause process." Men should also because the symptoms of menopause "can be very hard on relationships," Giblin said.

"If a partner sees a decrease in sex with their partner, often times the partner becomes resentful and feels that the woman has lost interest and it isn't necessarily true," Giblin said. "It's very critical for women and their significant other to stay really connected during menopause."

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