

Is sex once a week ENOUGH?

With Dame Jilly Cooper saying we should be doing it as much as possible, it has reignited an age-old debate...

We all know how difficult it can be to keep the passion alive in a relationship with so many other things taking up time and energy in our lives. And whether you're happy with your lot or going through a bit of a slump, it's only natural to wonder how often other couples are having sex, yet it's something we don't tend to talk about openly.

The age-old debate of how often is enough hit the headlines again recently when raunchy author Jilly Cooper weighed in, urging couples to get intimate as often as possible. Jilly, 87, famous for her sexy fiction books, including *Rivals* which has been adapted for TV and launches this week on Disney+, said: 'Life is quite short of joy and I think sex is heaven. I think one should have as much as you can.'

Forty nine per cent of Brits have sex at least once a week, while 19% do it two or three times, according to a survey by Ann Summers. However, one in 10 said, despite being in a relationship, they never have sex at all. Age can be a factor though – research shows a decline in how often couples have sex from age 40.

So, is there a magic number when it comes to sex? We talk to two women with very different expectations.

To find out how sex can keep you slim, turn to p26.

date night



'I HAD A LITTLE WIGGLE IN MY STEP AGAIN'

Emma Parsons-Reid, 57, lives in Cardiff with her husband Kev, 63

I think a lot of women assume their sex drive will die with the menopause but I'm proof that you can still have great sex – and lots of it, once you come out the other side.

When I met my husband Kev in 2002, our sex life was OK. As I started to be intimate twice a week, dwindling to once as we got older and work, elderly parents and grandchildren took up time and energy.

When I started the perimenopause at 47, I wasn't the easiest person to live with. Working full-time as a civil servant, I just didn't want to be bothered let alone have sex. I didn't like myself or Kev – everything irritated me and, when we did have sex, I felt like a chore. But by 54, my periods stopped, my hormones levelled out and I suddenly fell in love myself again. By now, I'd taken redundancy and was running a part-time cleaning business, meaning I had more time for myself. I joined a gym and gave

up smoking. Though quitting saw me put on 2st, I felt great because I was in control of my life. I grew my hair long and revelled in the fact men were taking second glances at me. After years of feeling miserable I felt feminine and had a little wiggle in my step which led to Kev and I finding our spark again. Thankfully, my sex drive was far from dead – I felt more alive than ever between the sheets.

As the organs returned, I embraced this second phase, buying sexy clothes and getting more adventurous. Once we started having more sex, we wanted it more and more.

For the last couple of years we've been doing it all the time. We're still busy but we make time and we love an afternoon in bed or a night at a hotel. Once a week wouldn't be enough to satisfy my sexual appetite and we're often intimate three or four times a week. It's the best sex we've had and I want to assure other women your libido is still there, it might calm down for a while, but please don't lose hope. You'll get it back and, like me, it could be even wilder than before.

'My sex drive was far from dead'



'WE DON'T HAVE TO PROVE ANYTHING'

Linda Aitchison, 56, lives in Wolverhampton with her partner Simon*, 60

With my partner Simon often working away and me busy

with everyday challenges from being a mum and business owner to having a social life of my own, sex often falls low on our list of priorities. Given the choice between a struggle on the sofa in front of Richard Osman and having sex, I'd choose the warmth of a cuddle most times. In a loving and stable relationship, I'm not ashamed to admit my sex life has waned over the years, and I think if most people my age were honest, they'd say the same. I used to joke I'd choose sex over money every time but I was young with a high sex drive then. I met my late husband

Neil in May 1996 and we threw ourselves into the throes of passion at every opportunity, giggling as we reached a target of being intimate in every room of the first house we bought together. Our twins Emily and Melissa were born in October 1998 and the drudgery of new parenthood limited our libidos. After Neil died from skin cancer in May 2012, it was six years before I could bring myself to do my toe in the online dating pool. I met Simon in April 2016 and eventually, with my girls at university, I started spending the night with him. But it was more than just sex – we loved each other and, neither of us felt the need to prove anything or to have sex for the sake of it. These days I'm content with or without sex. I've had a second chance at happiness and our connection is deeper than physical. It may not sound as thrilling as a Jilly Cooper page-turner but for me, it's perfect.

YES

'Sex is an investment in ourselves and our relationship'



Psychotherapist and relationship coach, Susie Masterson

MBACP, says:

'Whether through trying new experiences, being playful, or simply dedicating time to connect physically, maintaining a sexual relationship fosters desire and keeps the romance alive.'

While research shows that women tend to experience a drop in libido during perimenopause and menopause (in our 40s and 50s), there are significant benefits to sex as a 'symptom soother' including:

- improving vaginal health
- boosting mood
- reducing stress
- strengthening pelvic floor
- rekindling romance
- maintaining an emotional connection

When we frame something as a positive, we tend to invest in it more. For example, we might not like the idea of going to the gym, but if we fast forward to how we are going to look and feel afterwards, this framing can motivate us to go. I recommend women do the same when it comes to sex. Investing in sex is both an investment in ourselves as well as our relationship.'

Find out more about Susie's work at linked.in.com/in/susie-masterson