

Coping with a Partner's Diminished Sexual Desire

BioBalance Podcast — Dr. Kathy Maupin and [Brett Newcomb](#)

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Dr. Kathy Maupin: Hi. Welcome to the BioBalance podcast. I'm Dr. Kathy Maupin, founder and medical director of Bio Balance Health. Today Brett Newcomb and I will discuss how to reenter a relationship after coping for an extended period of time with a partner's diminished sexual interest. Brett, can you tell us what you do and how you take care of these problems?

Brett Newcomb: I could tell you what I do.

KM: Well, I mean, how you counsel your patients.

BN: I am a family and individual therapist and I've been in private practice in Missouri for 28 years. I've been teaching at the university level in counseling programs for 24 years. And, I have done a lot of work with couples around this issue, these issues we are going to be talking about today and in our other podcasts. I'm also interested, though; I know that you do more than just hormone replacement therapy at your practice. What are the kinds of things that you do that might have an impact on our conversation?

KM: Well, I replace any hormone, not just testosterone or estrogen for women, or testosterone for men. But, I also go through a sexual history to make sure that the couple has, if they have sexual problems, then I can refer them for that type of thing or talk to them about it and see if they are open to counseling. In general, though, my interest is . . .

BN: When you say sexual problems, you mean functional; performance issues, not fetishes.

KM: Functional. Right. No, I am talking about just kind of normal people who have normal lives and then they get to be 40 or 50 and one of them loses their sex drive. I try to replace the hormones and then if they still have a problem with their sexual relationship within the marriage, then I send them to someone to help counsel them. It's convincing them to go and get the counseling because it is much easier to accept a hormone pellet in their hip that's going to fix everything. It doesn't always fix all of the psychological things that have happened while they have had a disparate sexual drive.

BN: It is fascinating that you say that, because one of the things that I see a lot with people that come into counseling, initially, is that they want a quick fix and an easy fix - 'is there a pill I can take for this?' And oddly enough, you offer the pill that they can take for it. But it doesn't always solve the problem. Part of the reason that it doesn't always solve the problem is that we are not just talking about the mechanics and the physicality

of sex. We are talking about relationships and sex within the context of, or as an expression of self and love in a relationship.

KM: That's true. It takes hormones to get to that point, but then after you have been in the desert for a long time, it's hard to learn how to drink again.

BN: Well, yeah. And, they tell you don't drink too much too fast, so you won't get sick.

KM: That's true.

BN: So what we want to talk about today then, is if the set-up is that people have identified disparate imbalance or they recognize a change, and they've come to you however it is they've come to you, and you have worked your magic. And now that's been restored and the hormones are in balance and yet they still don't quite know; they're tentative or they're reluctant to take a risk to put things back together. What we want to do today is talk about specific kinds of techniques or approaches that they can use to work on these issues.

KM: That's what I am interested in hearing about today.

BN: Let me start with the word "forgive" because if there has been an imbalance or a disruption, there will have been a woundedness; there will be hurt and anger, and if we continue to embrace the relationship and say 'this is where my commitment lies and I want to get this back with you' what I have to do is let go of the resentment and the hurt and the anger. Now there are ways to do that - to feel it, to label it, to express it, externalize it, but part of what we call that is the process of forgiveness. I have to do a reset and say 'I am willing to go forward with you even though we have this history where I was once hurt or you were once hurt. Are you willing to go forward with me?'

KM: That's tough for couples because . . .

BN: It's tough for anybody.

KM: . . . they've spent time being very unhappy about this and trying to get help. When they finally get it fixed, they just can't forgive. They keep bringing up stuff that happened in the past.

BN: Yes. And, they have kept score, so they have to tell you what the score was.

KM: Right. I hear that and I think you know, I don't exactly how to get you to stop keeping score, because you are not going to go anywhere after that.

BN: You tell them exactly that. Stop keeping score. You are going to have to start over. It's a new endeavor. It connects to the old endeavor, but you can't bring up old wounds and old scores and beat each other up with them. One of the ways that you can try to approach that is you learn to talk in "I" statements and not "you" statements. "You treat me this way" "You don't respond to me this way" "You never touch me this way"; those are really negative, non-productive hurtful messages. A much better message is "I

would like it if you would” “I want you to” “I wish we could”; so, I speak for me but without labeling you.

KM: And that helps the forgiveness on the other side, too.

BN: Well it does, because part of what you have to recognize is whatever we had in our relationship that started to go wrong, “you can’t be a little bit pregnant”. It’s not just one person’s fault or responsibility. It’s a tag team match. And so part of healing is to accept the positive elements of the tag-team match. How do we start to communicate with each other in mutual, reciprocal, balancing ways? And in order to be open to doing that, we have to get rid of the anger and we have to do some forgiving and we have to engage in conscious communications around ‘what are we going to do about our sex life?’ For instance, one of the things that I find couples rarely talk about is their personal individual fantasies. When I am daydreaming about what would be a wonderful sexual experience for me, what do I fantasize about? And, would I have the nerve to tell my partner? Would I be ashamed, would I be embarrassed, would my partner shame me, or laugh at me or humiliate me to say ‘oh that’s ridiculous’? Or would my partner say, ‘you know what, I love you and if that’s what you want, we can experiment with that and see if it is something that I can do. But, I am open to hearing it and trying to engage in it. And, can I tell you what my fantasy is?’ So then we go down that road.

KM: I have much more experience in dealing with women, since I have been a gynecologist for 29 years.

BN: Please don’t tell me that women don’t have fantasies.

KM: No. Women in general don’t want to talk about them and if they do they’re shutting them down because they were told, you know, it was beaten into their head that they shouldn’t think like this, they shouldn’t be a sexual being. You’re supposed to be a good girl, you’re not a sexual being, you’re either a “good girl” or you’re a “slut”. So that’s what they think. When they have that type of thought, they put it out of their mind. It’s not supposed to be there.

BN: How nice that you are able to discuss that with them and that they may talk to you about that. What do you tell them? I mean, I’ve never been a girl, good or bad. So when you talk to them about that issue, what do you say?

KM: I say that the rules that we were given when we were children and adolescents hampered our sexuality now. And that those rules were then, and the rules that you have within a relationship are completely different. And so they can allow themselves to think about sex, talk about sex, engage in sex, ask for what they want. That’s not being a bad person. You’re still a good girl.

BN: But that requires that they know what they want, that they give themselves permission to become self aware and to get rid of those shame-based messages of ‘oh that’s awful’, or ‘that’s terrible’ or ‘that shouldn’t be’. But also then to honestly become

self aware, to say that's physically uncomfortable for me, that's repugnant for me in some way. And that doesn't mean because . . .

KM: Everything doesn't have to be okay. It's just that they have to think about whether it is okay for them. They can't bring themselves to think even if that act is okay.

BN: Right. And then how do they discuss that with their partner? If they can't even allow themselves to have a little snapshot of time where they can come in contact with that and say "oh, that might be something of interest."

KM: Well, the flip side of that is that men may have had the same kind of things kind of brainwashed into them when they were younger to control them so that they weren't out having relationships impregnating the neighbor or whatever. Their parents were telling them it was a bad thing; you only do this with girls you don't respect or something like that. I hear that and then the wife . . .

BN: When I was in high school they used to make the distinction - the girls that you do it with and the girls that you marry.

KM: Right. I've heard that too.

BN: And so you get that dichotomy that certain sexual behaviors, certain aspects of sex are not to be done with someone you love.

KM: And that carries into the marriage in many circumstances.

BN: Yes it does.

KM: That's a huge problem because when that's flipped, the patients that have a sex drive, when they get it back, they're like 'now what am I going to do with it? Because I have it back now-he has a sex drive, he's too controlled to let go and to do anything I want to do. And if I say it, then he will ask where did you get that? Have you been out getting that from somebody else or have you been reading the wrong books?' There's a lot of . . .

BN: And a lot of men are intimidated by sexually assertive women.

KM: That's true, but they are married to these women so they must have liked them in the beginning. So there is something about that person that they were in love with. I guess the other thing is that not everybody thinks about sex when they marry somebody. I mean they think they are going to have sex, they don't think 'oh I should have sex and find out if it is good before I marry them'. They don't find that as a criterion.

BN: Well, a lot of men, especially young men growing up, get focused on the objectification of things sexual and so they focus on body parts, or they focus on performance, or they focus on scores; how many women have you had, what have you

had done, or what have you been able to do, and so they keep track that way. And that isn't about relationship, it isn't about, for instance, sensuality and eroticism, which is going to be the topic of our next conversation. It is really about the object and the score. So part of what men have to learn is to recognize they are in a partnership and that there is mutuality and that the sexual behaviors, while they are individually exciting or satisfying, actually are in service of a greater goal, which is intimacy.

KM: And intimacy is one of the things that we aren't taught in school, we aren't taught.

BN: How does one be intimate?

KM: How do you learn to be intimate if you are never allowed to be. There are a lot of families that keep the boy and girl, (boyfriend girlfriend), apart so that nothing will happen. Or they are watched all the time. How do you learn to even have an intimate conversation when you know someone is overhearing it?

BN: Or in healthy families, have children seen their parents hug or kiss or caress. Have they seen them flirt and make what are obviously sexual asides? They may all moan and say 'oh gross, Dad,' but in a healthy family that is demonstrated as a given in a healthy relationship. It is not something you keep shamefully locked in the closet. And it is not something that you flagrantly display in front of your children. But, there are ways to communicate 'this is what intimacy looks like and it has a sexual component, and I find your father (or your mother) to be attractive.'

KM: And without having them totally grossed out.

BN: Absolutely. Not inappropriate.

KM: In other countries, people sleep in the same room and the same bed and somehow they grow up to be adults that aren't . .

BN: They don't have the same puritanical hang-ups that our culture has.

KM: They don't. That's true. And, that's good for society, to keep society in order, but it's not really good for adult people to maintain those in their adult relationships; it doesn't help the relationship at all.

BN: Last week we talked about mismatched desire and today we are talking about how to re-establish or reconnect with some level of peaceful satisfaction and happiness. We're talking about specific skills, and one of the skills that I encourage couples to try to develop is flirting. What does that mean; what does that look like; how does one flirt? Not with the grocery store clerk, but with your wife or your husband. To send the messages to your husband of 'you know what, you are still attractive to me.' Or, 'I really like your hair that way'; or 'I like that outfit on you' 'I like the way that shirt makes you look.' And what I find, at least in conversations that I have, is that women chronically are incapable of hearing those positive affirmations. So if I say I like your hair that way, or I

like that blouse on you, or that's an attractive outfit, they discount that and they're dismissive. Maybe because they think it is a come-on, maybe because they have self-image problems, maybe for some other reason. Or then again they were told don't be so high on yourself, don't be smug, you'll have an ego problem; whatever it may have been. So one of the things that I work with them on is take that message as an honest message and say thank you. Allow yourself to hear it. So when we flirt, part of flirting is learning to say thank you and letting yourself feel the attention or the attraction. Part of it is to talk to each other about what to you is romantic behavior. Not sex, not getting off, but romance.

KM: Right. That's hard for both sides to ask for that. We think you men should know, and men can't read our minds. I've heard that before.

BN: Is that why you make us watch "chick flicks"?

KM: Yeah. Of course. They're supposed to soften you up.

BN: We're supposed to get it second-hand? Good luck with that.

KM: Yeah, good luck.

BN: We're going to sneak off and watch Rambo or the sports game.

KM: Of course, but that's a beautiful difference between men and women because you don't want to be with someone who is exactly like yourself.

BN: One last thing I want to mention in this conversation is the power of touch. And, people that suffer from touch deprivation. When there has been sexual tension and sexual difficulty, and they're trying to recover, whether it has been a lack of interest, a lack of performance, an affair, whatever it may have been that was the source of the wound, part of the healing involves letting your bodies learn to touch each other and be safe again. Initially that's not about sex. It may involve sexualized contact, but it is not about intercourse, it is not about orgasm. It is about learning how to be in that space and feel safe, and feel with all of your senses that you are connected in love and in safety with your partner.

KM: For example, that would look like?

BN: It would look like saying, 10 minutes a week, 5 minutes a week, I want you to stop what you are doing, hold each other and pay complete attention to that process. Don't have the TV on, if the phone rings don't answer it, don't deal with the kids. If you have to go into your bedroom and lock the door, get your 5 minutes. But don't turn that into a sexual experience. Just touch. Just hold.

KM: Right. Women want a relationship, in general, and men want sex. That's what we're told. That's somewhat true. There are a lot of men who want relationships as well

as sex, and there are a lot of women who want sex as well as talking. But, you have to come from that beginning saying it's probably that, if you don't know, you have to almost ask if that is what the communication style is.

BN: Absolutely.

KM: That's something that is very hard between my couples. If they'll sit in my office, or in front of you I'm sure, they'll sit in my office and kind of talk about the differences, but they can't just stare at each other and talk about it.

BN: No. They can't and everybody that listens to these podcasts is not going to come to my office or your office. So what we would like to do is invite them, if they have specific questions, or if there is a reference to one of the techniques that we've mentioned or others that we haven't gotten to, if they would send an e-mail about their question to you, then we could address those in future conversations. And would be happy to do so.

KM: And our e-mail address is podcast@biobalancehealth.com so they can just write an e-mail and send that in without having to sign it.

BN: Yeah, send it anonymously, but it is a question that others might also benefit from hearing asked and addressed. And then next week, we are going to talk about sensuality and eroticism so be sure and tune in then.

KM: I think that sounds like an excellent title and excellent talk. So next week's show we will talk about sensuality and eroticism in relationships.