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It is my professional belief that some of these symptoms are part of a natural decline; and it's only

when they start to interfere with everyday life medical intervention is needed. I have had several patients exclaim that they are affected by hot flashes and wake up in a sweat several times during the night - to the point where they can't get any sleep. Obviously, this is a problem. If after many treatments and/or herbs, my patient finds that they are down to only a few flushes a week and the intensity and duration have decreased, I think this is a success.

The same goes for libido. There is a natural decline in men and women. It's only if and when this is starting to affect the rest of one's life that it should be viewed as a concern. There are many patients - from either sex - who have told me that they have a low sex drive and it wasn't a concern at all. Perhaps this patient didn't have a partner at the time, or had communication with their partner and there were no complaints all around.

### Life Coach vs. Acupuncturist

Many times we end up walking the line between counselor and healer. Knowing what one's strengths, weaknesses, and professional boundaries are key. If certain topics are beyond the healthcare realm (or uncomfortable for a practitioner), it's important to refer to a colleague for all the right reasons: professional, specialist and legal.

However, there are times in clinic where when something is said at the right time, with the right tone, it can empower a person. I always keep it positive in the clinic. It's not hard to do so. The reason is because of the type of field I'm in - regulation. Acupuncture is very self-regulating and I'd have to seriously get a diagnosis very wrong to administer a detrimental treatment. Most acu-points simply just heal the body and with the right intent (to do no harm), it's hard to go wrong. Herbs, obviously, is another story.

If the acupuncture treatment is in the right direction, and the language I use is correct, healing ensues. And herein lies the crux of libido and Chinese medicine treatment: there are times when it has less to do with what can be controlled inside the clinic and more to do with what can't be controlled outside the clinic.

A good friend and colleague, Jennifer Salib-Huber, BSc (hons), RD, ND, has seen just as many patients complain of the same low sex drive. She also noted that sometimes when those patients who are having menopausal symptoms get a new partner, their libido increases.

For me, this completely jives with what I've seen. There has been the odd patient who has been honest and open about the fact that the drive isn't the only thing that has left - the spark in their relationship is gone. So while we as healers can try to spend a course of treatment tonifying Kidney-Yang, what we really need to be doing is calling up our patient's partner and telling them to pick up some flowers on the way home.

### Working Theory & Subtle Suggestions

Doing what Chinese medicine does best, allows me to 'zoom out' and see the whole picture: Once upon a time, in the beginning of the relationship, there was passion. Outings were planned, dreams were made and romance flourished. Perhaps marriage and a honeymoon. Perhaps a job and some children. Perhaps a minivan.

Fast forward many years later and it's not hard to argue that, for many, the spark has gone out. The

spark is not something that is gone forever, of course, because in the event that there is a new partner later on in life, the spark seems to come back. Why you may ask? Because both people are trying again – trying to create a romantic scenario.

So what's there left to do for us poor healers? Ask the patient to consider couple's counseling? (Not a bad idea if the conversation drifts that way.) However, as we tonify Kidney energy (Kidney 7) and perhaps open up an 'Empty' heart (Heart 6), it might not be a bad idea to ask a few questions.

Asking questions is better than telling someone what to do. They arrive at their own conclusions, and the one asking the questions is more of a catalyst for change than forcing something to happen. Healthy, easy questions would look like: "Did you ever go on a honeymoon?" "Tell me a story of when your partner surprised you with something nice?" "Have you and your partner ever been out dancing?"

Reminders of how things used to be, coupled with a comforting treatment can be very helpful because what the patient once had in the past, they can easily relate to. And daydreaming of the past is a sure-fire way to relive it in the future. Straddling the line between life coach and acupuncturist is not an easy one, but it all comes down to my favorite topic: good bedside manner.

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