



MY SEXLESS RELATIONSHIP SECRET

“I’ll have to leave him if I want children”

Megan*, 30, is an advertising executive who lives with her partner of six years, James, 34, a stockbroker.

If you met James and I, you’d never know that behind our smiles lies a big secret: we haven’t had sex for almost two years – because *he* doesn’t want to. The few friends who do know are sympathetic, but society perpetuates the myth that everyone is having sex all of the time and if it’s anyone who’s saying no, it’s certainly never the man. So it’s not something I tell many people, as no-one would understand.

When I met James at a party, the attraction between us was instant. We ignored everyone else, flirted outrageously and left together a few hours later. We had sex three times that night and it was the best sex I’ve ever had, which I concede is pretty ironic considering our life now. He was very passionate, taking charge and telling me how much he loved my body. It really was amazing.

After six months, he told me he loved me and, looking back, that’s when things began to change. James was still affectionate, but it seemed the closer we got emotionally, the further apart we grew physically. The problem worsened when we moved in together – it wasn’t immediate, but before I knew it we

weren’t having sex at all. I know it seems crazy, but when the rest of your relationship is going well, it’s easy to turn a blind eye to your sexual problems and hope they’ll go away. If someone had said to me at the start of our relationship, “Sign here and you’ll never have sex again,” I’d have run a mile, but I kept hoping it was a blip and it would get better.

We talked about it and James insisted it was his problem, not mine. I know he’s not cheating on me, and his libido is OK physically; it’s more, as he says, that for him sex used to be about the thrill of the chase – he had a lot of lovers before me. If I was to analyse it, I’d say he can’t reconcile the Madonna-whore complex, not that he’d admit it.

Once, we set a date to make love and, when the time arrived, James lay on the bed and said, “Get on then.” It was the most humiliating moment of my life. As a woman, I need emotional and physical attention to feel sexual, so knowing he’s not into it is a libido-killer for me. I’ve become so inured to it I think

I have lost some of my sexuality. I don’t look at other men and I don’t feel tempted to have an affair. I almost feel like a non-woman.

I know people reading this will think, “Just leave him,” and I suppose I’ll have to, but I haven’t been able to turn my back on someone I love so much in every other respect. It’s a frustrating situation, one where I don’t feel anyone can help – as it’s almost taboo. I can’t believe it has happened to me – I feel like I’m 75 and have been married for 40 years, instead of a woman in her prime.

I have pushed the problem to the back of my mind, because when I stop to think about it I get really upset – not least because my biological clock is ticking, and if I want children then I’m going to have to leave James.

Living in a low- or no-sex relationship sounds comedic, but I believe it’s more common than people think. On the rare occasions I have told friends, I’ve discovered more than one person in a similar situation. I think it would surprise people how many of us there are. ►



“He was meant to be a sexy toy boy”

Kate, 35, works in PR. She dated teacher Lachlan, 28, for two years.

My friends said I struck it lucky when I met Lachlan. Good-looking and seven years younger than me, he was the toy boy I'd always wanted and he adored me. At 24, he was still living in a student house, whereas I'd bought my first apartment. Sex for me has always been better with decent sheets and the privacy you don't get in a shared unit, so when his lease ran out seven weeks later and he suggested moving in, it seemed right.

Everyone thought we must be having fantastic sex, especially as he looked like a Calvin Klein model in his undies. But if I'm honest, the sex was ordinary. He was gentle and loving, so I refused to think about why the sex, although frequent, felt dispassionate.

We were a great couple in many ways; sharing friends, a love of travel, a secret passion for hardware stores and romantic plans for our future together. Lachlan seemed to revel in our domesticity, and I'd often find myself persuading him to go out when all he wanted to do was stay in with me and the cat. What I realise now, though, is that if the sexual spark isn't there you can't replace it. Four months after we'd met, we'd make love twice a month and that was only when I made a move. I knew something was wrong, but I loved Lachlan so much I couldn't bear to think everything wasn't perfect in our little world.

Each night we'd lie naked in bed, kiss each other on the lips, say “I love you”, then both quietly turn our backs. I could touch my loneliness. The man of my dreams was lying right next to me, but the space between us was growing bigger every day.

It's easy to say you should finish with a man who won't fulfil your sexual needs, but life's more complicated than that. I was passionate about Lachlan and prepared to do anything to make it work. So I set out to seduce him all over again, booking us weekends away and buying enough sexy lingerie to bankrupt me. When I tried to get him to talk, he'd mumble excuses about being stressed at work, and that would be that. We soon fell back into our old habits, and sex twice a month became once every two months.

On our second anniversary, Lachlan took me to dinner and talked about how I'd changed his life and how he could see us married one day. Marriage? With a man who wouldn't make love to me? I'd rather be single for the

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rest of my life. His comment sent me spiralling into action and, within a week, I'd arranged for us to see a relationship counsellor. Lachlan was reluctant to go, but when we got there he opened up. When the therapist asked him how he saw me, he replied, “Sometimes, I think of her as more like a sister than a girlfriend.”

He also admitted that he felt emasculated because I organised everything in our relationship, from our finances to holidays; even down to his wardrobe. The truth was brutal and I cried throughout the session, but it helped me make a decision. That night, as we hugged each other tightly, I told Lachlan I couldn't spend the rest of my life in a celibate relationship. He moved out the next week.

Two years on, we're good friends and we've both got new partners. My sex life has improved enormously, but Lachlan says it's still not high on his list of priorities.

“Our marriage is cerebral”

Jennifer, 37, is a real estate agent. She's been married to Tom, 38, a lawyer, for three years and they have an 18-month-old son, Lucas.

I always know when I'll be having sex – it's a case of high days and holidays, so if we make love five times a year I'll be lucky. But I don't want pity; I knew exactly what I was getting into when I married Tom.

We'd been friends for five years before one confessional night out when we realised we were made for each other. But as soon as we'd kissed, he told me he had a low sex drive, which had affected his previous relationships. I was shocked and found it ironic as I'd had a string of testosterone-charged lovers for the past decade. But none of them were great husband material, unlike Tom.

The first night we spent together was lovely, with lots of long kisses and “why didn't we get together before”. He was affectionate and cuddly, although the sex itself was over quite soon. Right from the start we had more of a cerebral relationship than I have ever experienced. In the past I'd had an amazing sex life with horrendous partners, and now I had the opposite – a man who loved me for more than just my cleavage.

Our relationship got serious quickly, so it was no surprise when he proposed six months later. I was 35 and knew I couldn't leave it too late to try for a baby. Tom agreed to try for a child and for a man with a self-confessed low libido, he excelled himself, making love at least three times a week.

It was a magical time, and part of me did wonder if Tom's problems were all in his mind, but he is an inherently honest man and I knew he was telling me the truth about his sex drive. When we married on the anniversary of our first date, I was two months pregnant.

As soon as I conceived, we stopped having sex, and only resumed when I instigated it when Lucas was four months old. I suspect if I hadn't, Tom would have been quite happy to never bother again.

Our sporadic love life now consists of the odd weekend away in expensive hotels. Sometimes, I think I've made some sort of Faustian pact, but I wouldn't swap the love and happiness I've found with Tom and Lucas for any amount of mind-blowing sex. ■

HOW COMMON IS IT?

World-leading couples therapist Esther Perel believes there's a growing trend for men to withhold sex within a relationship. “Over the past five years, I have counselled more and more men whose desire for their spouses has disappeared, causing serious problems within their relationships. The most common problems are conflict with their partners; high stress levels; the arrival of a baby; use of antidepressants; and abnormal hormonal levels. Another reason for a man to lose his libido is that too much intimacy within a relationship can lead to a brother/sister-type relationship. Love seeks closeness, but desire seeks separateness, and eroticism – ultimately – thrives on risk and novelty.” For more details, visit www.relationships.com.au or www.estherperel.com.