

Study: Placebo improves sex life for women

November 17 2010, By Betty Klinck

Many are constantly searching for the key to more satisfying sex, but a recent study suggests that finding that key may be easier than we think.

Researchers at the Sexual Psychophysiology Laboratory at the University of Texas-Austin found that women experienced improvements in symptoms such as low sex drive just from getting a placebo in a clinical trial.

Women may have experienced increased satisfaction simply because they decided to take action and experienced increased hope, says researcher Andrea Bradford. The study was published in September in the Journal of Sexual Medicine.

"It's not going to change if you just wait for it to happen," Bradford says. "Changing how you approach the problem might in itself make a big difference."

Bradford and psychology professor Cindy Meston used data that drug company Lilly ICOS collected in a clinical trial of Cialis, an [erectile dysfunction](#) drug, on women. One-third of the 50 women on the placebo experienced more satisfying sex over a 12-week period, during which they completed questionnaires and met with clinicians to assess symptoms.

Measuring female sexual dysfunction and satisfaction can be difficult sometimes, because it is very much based on the woman's own observations of her symptoms, says Meston.

"Sexual dysfunction is, in a way, what a woman says it is. If she perceives herself to have low desire or difficulty having an orgasm, that's what we take," says Bradford. She adds that physically measuring [sexual function](#) in women, such as blood flow to the [genitals](#), is not a true reflection of sexual satisfaction.

Meston says the women studied were all in committed, stable relationships, many married, and the hope the trial gave them of improvement and increased sex may have created a more positive relationship dynamic and more intimacy, leading to better sex. She notes also that decreased sex drive in a long-term relationship is normal for [women](#).

Andrew Goldstein, a gynecologist and [sexual-medicine](#) specialist who directs the Sexual Wellness Center in Annapolis, Md., says that while the findings are valuable, these trials take place over a limited duration, and keeping up with good habits (such as talking about and recording symptoms and having frequent sex) can be a challenge.

"Ultimately it's difficult. You can tell a woman to do these things for three or six months, but that doesn't hold up so well over three or six years," he says.

"We've all done a diet before. We can all be good for two months. But what about for two years?"

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