

25. "Q&A My Uncircumcised Penis"

Okay, our first question comes through the Love and Libido website. Firstly, thank you for doing what you do. You are very welcome, my friend.

He goes on. I'm a 32-year-old straight male. I am American and uncircumcised.

I've had a lot of female friends and co-workers over the years and a few sexual partners. And anytime I've heard uncircumcised penises come up in conversation, everyone always expresses their distaste at just the thought of them. It's been the cause of dismay, depression, and low self-esteem for most of my life.

My first and only one-night stand ended with the woman seeing my genitalia and shrieking before leaving and holding her forehead in her palm like I'd insulted her. Even more accepting long-term girlfriends have refused to try oral sex with me, despite that I practice good hygiene and am of normal size, and despite the fact that I always enjoy giving it to them. It's to the point where I feel I must ashamedly have a conversation with a prospective love interest about my genitalia's appearance before entering into a committed relationship so as not to hide it before things become sexual.

What can I do to stop feeling like an abnormality in a society that does not accept my genitalia, short of performing a painful procedure that I really consider to be a form of bodily mutilation? I've been considering circumcision for years now, and despite numerous tattoos and piercings elsewhere, it's absolutely horrifying to me. Thank you for any help you can offer. Signed, Ashamed of my genitalia.

Okay, before I go ballistic on that woman from your one-night stand, let's start by reviewing some statistics, shall we? According to the World Health Organization, about one in three men around the world are circumcised. It's a religious ritual for some groups like Jewish folks, and it's super common in the Middle East, but it's rare in other countries like the UK, Latin America, Asia, and Europe, which have rates of less than 20%. So, first of all, if we're looking at global statistics, you are in the majority, not the minority.

Now, here in the US, circumcision is more common, but CDC shows a decline in the prevalence of it over the years. It's fallen from about 83% in the 1960s to about 77% by 2010. Overall, the World Health Organization estimates that about 76 to 92% of US males have been circumcised.

Now, I also want to note the variability by region just here in the US. Western states have the lowest rates of circumcision, and Midwestern states have the highest rates. So, if you're emailing from Michigan, let's say, I get why you'd feel out of the norm.

Now that we've reviewed some of the statistics, let's address your concern. First of all, any partner that reacts with disgust or otherwise behaves like the woman from your one-

night stand is not worth being your sexual partner. The end.

This goes for a reaction to anything sexual, whether it's the appearance of your genitalia or anything else. And for anyone listening, I want this to be a lesson. Your reaction to your partner, whether it's your reaction to a sexual issue they may have or their body, significantly worsens how they may have felt on their own.

Just don't do it. Don't be rude. Please be kind, be compassionate, and gentle.

If you're a partner to a penis owner out there and you've never been with someone who is uncut, you need to take a beat and remember that non-circumcised penises are more common than you might realize. And with rates of circumcision going down, it's highly likely you're going to see more of them. Now you said that more serious girlfriends have refused to give you oral sex.

And I just wonder who these women are that you're hooking up with. I have lots of clients in relationships with people who are uncut and oral sex is not a problem. I say that because I don't want you to give up hope.

I think you just need to keep looking until you find a more understanding partner. If you have low self-esteem, chances are you're settling for people who also have low self-esteem or who treat you the way maybe you think you should be treated. But I think that as you build your confidence, you'll start attracting a better quality person.

You ask how you can stop feeling like an abnormality in a society that doesn't accept your genitalia. I want to tell you, my friend, it is not society that doesn't accept you. It was that one partner who frankly was just awful and not worth your time.

I think it might help actually to look at images or even porn of uncircumcised men. It might help how you feel about yourself. If you consider circumcision to be a form of genital mutilation, then you shouldn't do it.

Don't push yourself to do it just because you think that's what society expects of you, because it's not. You say that you've had very few sexual partners because of your insecurities, so you're actually drawing a big conclusion from a pretty limited sample size. I also don't think that you need to have a sit-down conversation about not being circumcised with prospective partners.

Once you gain more confidence, you'll, and you may have to kind of fake confidence until you make it, but try this. Imagine you and your partner are making out, getting hot and heavy, and you see where things are headed. You could say something like, have you ever been with someone who is uncut? You're going to love it, and she probably will, by the way.

A lot of women say that penetration feels amazing because the quote-unquote ribbing

provides extra g-spot stimulation. I'd also encourage you for a little while to maybe spend a bit more time getting to know women before becoming sexual with them. Watch how they treat waiters when you're out at a restaurant, or try to in some way gauge whether they're expressing a lot of judgment towards other people.

These are going to be red flags that they might be judgmental towards you, and I think that until you build your confidence, it might be best to avoid one-night stands for a while. I think you might be a little bit traumatized from this experience that you had, and it's kind of sent you into a spiral of thinking that you need to get circumcised in order to please partners, and that is just not the direction you want to go. I'd encourage you to spend some time building up your confidence, checking out some pictures or videos of people who have penises who aren't circumcised, just so that you can kind of normalize your own appearance, because again, I want you to remember that statistic that I opened up with.

Two-thirds of men around the world are not circumcised, so you are in the majority here. I think you sound like an amazing guy and a great sexual partner, so please don't give up hope. Okay, my next question also comes through the Love and Libido website.

Here we go. I'm a 46-year-old male and have been married for 15 years. My wife and I stopped having sex about five years ago.

Initially, it was because of a stage 3 cancer diagnosis. My wife went through a very intensive cancer treatment through MD Anderson. She had a double mastectomy and medically-induced menopause. On top of that, she has a history of sexual abuse from when she was younger. We've had multiple discussions about this issue, and she has told me on many occasions that the drugs she takes and many others have killed all sexual libido she had, and that she feels zero sexual feelings for me, and that it's too painful to have vaginal intercourse. We haven't tried in five years, so I don't know if this is something she's done on her own to test.

She will not have oral or any other sex because of her history of abuse, or at least this is the excuse that I'm told. I offered to just let her watch to be a part of it, and she said this is what used to happen when she was being abused. We used to have an amazing sex life until around 2012.

I had gained a lot of weight and was away on a work trip. She had an affair at this time. We've both done a lot of therapy on our own over the last four years, but not any sex therapy together.

We are great partners at raising our 11-year-old daughter, but have zero intimacy. On top of the cancer diagnosis and the fact that she had an affair in 2012, it's always in the back of my mind that it's a potential reason for why we aren't having sex if there's someone else. I've asked her multiple times, and she says there isn't, and even

commented one time that, quote, you wish I would tell you there is someone else.

We sleep in different rooms, and I have zero confidence when it comes to trying to have sex with her because of the things she's told me. She's classified as NED now, no evidence of disease, of which we are blessed, but I want to feel wanted, and I don't know how much longer I can go on like this. I want to stay married and have a sexual relationship with my wife, whatever that looks like, intercourse, oral sex, etc., but I think she's perfectly content with the way our relationship is now, of which is based upon her getting whatever she wants.

I feel like I am just a provider and a means to an end for her getting whatever she wants, but her never giving me what I want, and that's sexual intimacy. Okay, oh my gosh, there is so much going on for you guys. I'm just going to try to tackle this question one topic at a time because truthfully, I could have a whole podcast episode on sex after cancer and sex after affair recovery and how to revive sexual intimacy when there's been a long period of disconnect and how to recover sexual intimacy when there's been a history of abuse that's re-triggered, and so there's just a lot going on.

I want you to first practice a lot of compassion for yourself and compassion for her and just more generally compassion for your relationship, for everything you guys have gone through as a couple. I think it's important to start by recognizing some of the strengths, and that is that you say you are really good co-parents to your 11-year-old daughter, and it sounds like through everything you've been through, I sense that there's still some emotional intimacy and closeness and at the very least a commitment to one another, despite the fact that things have really fallen apart sexually. So let's start with the cancer.

So yes, the majority of people do notice a drop in their libido when they're going through cancer, and that really spans from the point that they're diagnosed, just because that's obviously very traumatic and fear-laden, and then through the time that they're going through cancer treatments, obviously chemotherapy can make people feel really sick and other medications can make people feel really sick. So there's a lot of very legitimate reasons why she noticed a drop in her libido during that time. The good news is that there's a lot of evidence to suggest that people can recover their sexuality even after going through cancer.

I really think that where there's a will, there's a way. Now, I hear that she right now doesn't have much strong of a will or a want to want, and that is going to be a little bit of a barrier, but we have a lot of evidence that mindfulness techniques can reawaken the pleasure pathways. I think that when someone's going through cancer, there's obviously so much fear, there's emotional pain, there's physical pain, and that can kind of disconnect people from their pleasure pathways, but mindfulness techniques can do wonders to open those back up again.

Lori Brotto's book, which is *Better Sex Through Mindfulness*, has some good techniques in there, and I'd encourage you maybe to pick up a copy of that, share it with your wife if she's willing to take a look. I've worked actually with a lot of couples to help recover sexuality after cancer, both women who've gone through cancer and men who've gone through cancer, and so it definitely is possible. Unfortunately, a lot of doctors don't really talk about it, and so I think that that's obviously a huge deficit in the medical community and something that we need to keep working on.

You know, you say that she had a double mastectomy. I think so much femininity for women is tied to their breasts, and so it's likely that she has a lot of body image concerns, and you say you've done couples therapy together, but I wonder how much individual therapy she's done on her own to work through that. It just sounds like it was a really challenging time for her and for you guys as a couple, so I would encourage you guys to check out that book, and you know, I'm just curious what her body image is like after everything she went through with the double mastectomy and hysterectomy.

I wonder if she's just feeling really disconnected from her femininity and as a result her sexuality. Now, you say there was also this affair that happened in 2012, so that would have been about 10 years ago, and you know, honestly, if it sounds like you guys have done some good therapy to recover from that. You say you've done four years of couples therapy but not sex therapy.

If your therapist has neglected talking to you guys about how to reintegrate intimacy as part of your affair recovery, then I really would encourage you to find someone who can talk to you about that. I'm hearing from you that the fact that she had an affair once before just adds to the insecurities you're already feeling that maybe she's getting her sexual needs met somewhere else, and I know she's reassured you several times that that's not what's happening, but your feelings are natural. I mean, I think it's really normal to feel like for that question to pop into your head if, you know, this happened once before and now sex is an issue for you guys.

So I'm not saying that at all that that's what's happening, but I do want to validate the feelings that you have. You know, anyone who is experiencing a really big sexual disconnect in their relationship is going to have the feelings that you have. There is nothing wrong with you for wanting to feel wanted, for wanting to feel desired for by your wife, for having an interest in maintaining that part of your relationship.

I think those feelings are totally normal and I just want you to understand that that's totally valid to feel that way. I think obviously I see that the abuse, her history of abuse, is playing into this as well. You say that there's an unwillingness to do oral sex or any other kinds of sex because of her history of abuse, and that is going to be a challenge because that's usually what I recommend when, you know, one aspect of sex isn't available.

Let's say intercourse because you're saying it's painful for her, that you are adaptable to those circumstances and find other ways of connecting sexually that feel good to both of you, and that really means thinking outside the box and connecting in other ways, but I hear you saying that that is very triggering for her. I don't want to keep recommending therapy, but I think really what I'm thinking is that it would benefit her to work with a trauma therapist. Going through cancer is traumatic and obviously there might be some residual trauma from the abuse that she experienced and she may be able to work through both of those issues with the same therapist.

We have come a long way in our ability to treat trauma. It is not just sitting back and talking to a therapist who is more passively listening. We have some really cool, interesting, empirically validated, you know, interventions to treat trauma these days.

EMDR is one that I use a lot with my clients. I find it to be very effective when there is abuse that we're working on from someone's past and so it may be worth looking in your area to see if there's a therapist, assuming your wife is maybe willing to do that, to help her overcome some of those lingering issues. Now, you say one thing at the end that I want to talk to you about a little bit.

You say that you're a provider and you give her what she wants, but she doesn't give you what you want, which is sexual intimacy. You want to be really careful not to make sex transactional. When you communicate your desire for sex, make sure you state that it's about the emotional connection and not just the physical release, and certainly avoid language that makes it feel tit-for-tat because that's just going to turn her off.

My last question to you, and this may be kind of a last resort assuming she's not willing to go back to therapy and she's just saying that it's just not an option for you guys to try to reconnect in this way, is to have a conversation with her about restructuring the relationship. It may be a time to explore some form of non-monogamy. I heard in your message that that's not necessarily what you want.

You say you want to stay married and have a sexual relationship with your wife, but she's saying to you very clearly that that is not something she's at all interested in and that she doesn't have sexual feelings at all right now. And so, I wonder if it may be time to have that conversation, at least see. You can explore yourself whether that's something you might be comfortable with and you can talk to her about it.

I know that may feel like it comes as a last resort, but I hear you saying you don't necessarily want to get a divorce because you have your 11-year-old daughter and you're co-parenting really well together. It may be that some kind of restructuring comes into place so that you can get some of your sexual needs met in a way that doesn't trigger her or make her feel like she's doing something that doesn't want to do. Overall though, everything you're describing is treatable.

Mindfulness interventions really help for people who are trying to reconnect with their pleasure after going through cancer. Working with a really good marriage therapist who has training in sex therapy can help as it relates to the affair recovery. And then obviously working with someone who has experience in trauma can help the feeling she has about being triggered with other aspects of sexuality aside from intercourse.

And she could also work with a physical therapist on some of the pain that she's experiencing. That's also super normal for women to have when they've undergone a hysterectomy or a surgical menopause is to experience vaginal dryness because of the drop of estrogen. And she may not be able to take any estrogen because of her cancer history, but there's a lot a physical therapist, a pelvic floor physical therapist can do for her to help with the pain that she's experiencing vaginally.

There's a lot of exercises and again, we just know so much more these days about how to treat those kinds of issues. So there is help available. I hope that some of this advice was helpful.

I hear that you still love your wife and that you want sex to be an opportunity for you guys to connect emotionally. I think all you can do at this point is communicate that to her and let her know some of the resources that I've shared with you today and see if there's anything that she might be willing to explore. I wish you the best of luck.