

The ties that bind

So the sex isn't as steamy or as frequent as it used to be. If you are in a long-term relationship, it's inevitable you'll go through the occasional dry patch.

Mary Clegg, sex education consultant to London sex-themed attraction Amora, The Academy of Sex and Relationships, says that couples who have been together for a while don't always bother keeping things fresh: 'They don't communicate or experiment. Being able to talk about sex in a natural way is hard but it never ceases to amaze me how people can talk about everything except the sex they want, where they want it and how much they want it.' So, if you are in need of some passion, take a few tips from the experts...

Bondage

Many a sad sex life has been saved by a silk scarf. Why? Because bondage gives a psychological thrill: 'It gives you the chance to relinquish control and be teased or to have your partner at your mercy,' says Emily Dubberley, author of audiobook *Dark Desires* (www.audible.co.uk, £4.99).

There are lots of ways to do it, says Dr Petra Boynton, psychologist and sex editor at lifestyle website www.mansized.co.uk: 'You can blindfold your partner or leave them with just one hand free.'

Julie Peasgood, author of *The Greatest Sex Tips In The World* (Public Eye Publications, £6.99), suggests starting with tights, a silk scarf or 'whatever's accessible and not too threatening'.

Remember, kinky sex doesn't come without its dangers, so keep an eye out for lifeless body parts. 'If a hand or leg goes cold or purple, it's a warning sign, so



Picture: Getty/Amara

Arresting sight: Role-playing is one way to boost your love life...

undo all knots straight away,' says Peasgood. 'In fact, it's a good idea to have some scissors standing by if you weren't in the Scouts or Guides.' Bondage is best kept for long-term relationships where there's trust. And get a safe word first, too: 'You need a word that isn't "stop" or "no" as they might think you're just playing along,' says Dr Boynton. 'It has to mean stop play immediately.'

For more information, read Jay Wiseman's *Erotic Bondage Handbook* (Greenery Press, £8.36).

Threesome or group sex

Don't invite other people into your bed to patch up a problem, says Dr Boynton: 'Some people do it because they worry their partner will cheat anyway or because they're coerced into it. It's great to explore but this is serious business.'

If you decide group sex is something you both want to do, start looking at the practical side of it: 'Discuss when and how it's going to happen and test the waters by looking at swinging websites,'

suggests Dr Boynton. If you decide to ask a friend or a couple you know, remember it will change the dynamics of your relationship for ever. 'Again, decide beforehand what will happen. Will it be just the two girls while he watches or is he allowed to get involved? Remember: always play safe and wear a condom. For facts on protection and infections, see www.condomessentialwear.co.uk.

Sex toys

Taking a toy to bed can have its dangers, so approach the subject carefully, warns Dr Boynton: 'Men are still uncomfortable about sharing their partner with a sex toy. They worry they will look small in comparison or that the toy might satisfy her more.'

Talk about it first and choose one together. Unfortunately, ladies, if you do have your eye on the King Kong or the Joystick Mr Big, you should plan a separate shopping trip.

But Georgia Juett, who has worked on the product development and design of female sex toys at London sex shop Sh!, says bigger isn't always better: 'We've heard it before and with sex toys it's also true. A sex toy has many functions. Check out the materials – silicone is best as it acclimatises to your body's temperature but also check out the vibrating speed, pulsation and rotation options.'

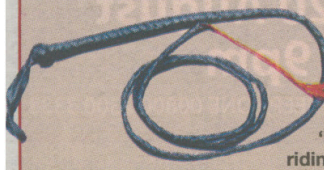
Finally, Dr Boynton suggests that you should involve your other half, too: 'Rolling around on your own might make it uncomfortable for you both.'

■ Visit www.goodvibes.com or www.sh-womenstore.com for sex toys, paddles and whips.

Spanking

The most popular position is over the knee, says Peasgood. 'It's all about submissive helplessness versus power and control, rather than the pain factor.' So don't go charging in there with a great big wallop. Dubberley explains the correct technique: 'Avoid spanking the kidneys. Instead, focus on the 'sweet spot' – the point at which buttocks meet thighs.'

If you're scared of bringing up the subject, buy a general book on sex tips. Try anything from Greenery Press, which has many titles covering alternative sex practices (www.greenerypress.com). Or you could rent a sexy movie – try *The Secretary*. 'Casually mention how fun it looks,' says Dr Boynton. 'Don't come home with a riding crop under your arm.'



Is your car ugly? – Wheels, p39