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Wellness PROFILE

Ridwan Shabsigh, MD

Optimal Sexual Health for a Lifetime

By Bruce Scali



Dr. Ridwan Shabsigh has dedicated his life to the research, teaching, and clinical practice of a relatively new branch of medicine: sexual health. A board-certified urologist and associate professor of urology at Columbia University in New York, Dr. Shabsigh refuses to accept the conventional wisdom that a loss of sexual function and enjoyment is an inevitable consequence of aging.

According to Dr. Shabsigh, “Everyone can have better sex, whether a person is 25 and in peak physical condition, 40 and experiencing the first signs of declining health, 55 with a heart condition, or 70 with multiple health issues. And most people can have it without medical intervention.”

Dr. Shabsigh’s easy manner does not diminish the serious message he delivers each day in his medical practice. “If you want sex to be sensational,” he says, “and you want to have it for as long as you live, it must be pursued in the context of better overall health.”

In his recent book, *Sensational Sex in 7 Easy Steps: The Proven Plan for Enhancing Your Sexual Function and Achieving Optimum Health*, Dr. Shabsigh explains the many ways in which sexual function relates to the health of the mind and body, and how understanding these connections can lead to a lifetime of pleasurable reward.

HEALTHY SEXUALITY: MORE THAN A MAGIC PILL

Dr. Shabsigh says that anyone who believes that heavily promoted drugs like Viagra® and Levitra® have solved the problem of male sexual dysfunction is sadly mistaken.

These drugs do not work for about a third of the patients who try them, and even when they do work, they do not address the underlying health conditions that cause sexual dysfunction. Moreover, such conditions usually worsen over time, to a point where such medications provide little if any relief. Dr. Shabsigh cautions against what he calls the “hallway prescription”—when a man who visits his doctor for another condition asks for an erection-producing drug on his way out the door.

Sexual function is intimately connected to the brain and the cardiovascular, neurological, and hormonal systems, as well as to the health of a man’s primary relationship. Medical treatments for sexual dysfunction—drugs, injections, implants—may be appropriate and often do work, but they should be selected and administered only after a thorough examination that uncovers all of the pertinent systemic issues. Common health conditions, such as diabetes, obesity, metabolic syndrome, depression, heart disease, and atherosclerosis, have a direct impact on sexual function. In addition, sexual dysfunction is a frequent side effect of medications that are commonly prescribed for other conditions.

COMMON CAUSES OF SEXUAL DYSFUNCTION

- Cardiovascular disease
- Hypogonadism (low testosterone)
- Metabolic syndrome
- Diabetes
- Obesity

- Drug, alcohol, or tobacco abuse
- Depression
- Medication side effects

Dr. Shabsigh makes specific treatment recommendations only after a comprehensive medical history review, physical examination, and blood workup (revealing the patient's cardiovascular status and hormone and glucose levels). He regards each patient encounter as an opportunity to help preserve or improve overall health, and firmly believes that every man should have a thorough annual check-up.

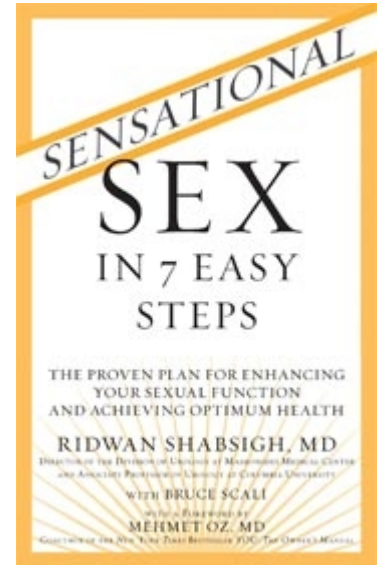
"I understand that we live in a world of 'fast-food' approaches to everything, but when it comes to sexual health, we shouldn't rely on quick fixes," says Dr. Shabsigh. "If arteries are becoming occluded, there's a lot more than erections at stake." His treatment plans contain specific remedies to tackle sexual dysfunction, but also address other health issues that are essential to every patient, such as weight loss, smoking cessation, stress reduction, glucose management, blood pressure control, and hormone balancing. Patients come to Dr. Shabsigh in search of better sex, but they leave on their way to better health.

HEALTHY LIFESTYLE DICTATES HEALTHY SEXUAL FUNCTION

If disease is present anywhere in the body, Dr. Shabsigh's holistic approach to sexual dysfunction seeks to halt or reverse it. The best way to avoid any ailment or improve the effectiveness of any treatment—while ensuring a lifetime of sexual enjoyment—is a comprehensive lifestyle approach. This strategy incorporates healthy dietary habits, regular exercise, avoiding self-destructive behaviors, proper supplementation for overall and sexual health, stress reduction, and dedicated attention to a sexual partner.

The importance of this last element cannot be overstated, notes Dr. Shabsigh. Controlled studies have established that the health of a primary relationship plays a vital role in sexual performance and satisfaction for both partners. Dr. Shabsigh's book focuses on male sexual function, but also includes an extensive discussion of female sexuality, along with recommendations on how to get the most out of a relationship. These address such challenges as maintaining passion, communicating on multiple levels, and overcoming outside forces (such as job, family, or financial issues) that conspire to weaken a sexual connection.

A healthy lifestyle is the foundation of Dr. Shabsigh's 7-step program for sensational sex. He stresses that the decisions you make—all day, every day—about your habits, what you eat, how you take care of yourself, and how you juggle such issues as job, family, and your principal relationship can all affect sexual function. Making better decisions across the board leads to better sex.



"Patients are often surprised by how much control they can have over their bodies," says Dr. Shabsigh. "Every drag on a cigarette is a drag on sexual performance. Excess pounds strain sexual health. And are you getting the proper sexual nutrition? Is your life too busy for exercise? Well, if you want to 'make time,' then make time for a regular walk or some other

workout." Overlooked lifestyle factors that affect your sexual enjoyment may include dental hygiene, how hard you work, and how well you sleep. Dr. Shabsigh's book offers clinically proven approaches for every lifestyle issue, not the least of which is proper nutritional supplementation.

"Every man should discuss supplements appropriate for him with a doctor," Dr. Shabsigh explains. "In general, a good program will include a broad-spectrum antioxidant and a prostate formula, as well as other important nutrients that support overall and sexual health. If you have elevated blood

glucose, anxiety, or depression, prescription medications aren't always needed. As is the case with sexual dysfunction, there are excellent natural approaches that can help." He cautions, however, to "be sure you get supplements from a reliable source, and keep in mind that the cheapest alternative isn't necessarily the best one. Ingredient quality and manufacturing processes differ widely."

- Smoking cessation
- Weight reduction
- Regular exercise
- Stress management
- Proper sleep
- Nutritional supplements

MEDICAL OPTIONS AS A LAST RESORT

When lifestyle approaches or disease management fails to address a patient's sexual dysfunction, Dr. Shabsigh discusses a broad range of medical options with men and couples. During this process, he considers patient preferences related to invasiveness, convenience, effectiveness, possible side effects, partner satisfaction, and cost. Once the doctor and patient agree on an approach, treatment is administered.



Erectile dysfunction is the most common type of sexual dysfunction, but not the only one. Others include hypoactive sexual desire disorder (low desire), ejaculatory disorders (premature or delayed ejaculation), Peyronie's disease (penile curvature), and priapism (prolonged erection). Dr. Shabsigh examines each of these conditions in detail in his new book, discussing natural treatments in conjunction with medical approaches. The book also includes information on the treatment of female sexual dysfunction.

Dr. Shabsigh says his patients are his best teachers, and he often refers to an 80-year-old patient who came to him some time ago. The man stated with a level voice that he worked part-time, paid taxes, swam, and played tennis, and that if he did all of that, he deserved to have sex. Dr. Shabsigh could not have agreed more.

"Everyone can have better sex—even those with cancer, advanced heart disease, or debilitating injury." There is something for everyone in Dr. Shabsigh's approach to promoting healthy sexual function at every age.

SUPPLEMENTAL SUPPORT

OVERALL HEALTH

Vitamin B-complex: B1 B2 B3 B6 B12 Folic Acid Choline
 Vitamin D Vitamin E Magnesium Calcium Chromium
 Antioxidant support Vitamin C N-acetylcysteine Glutathione
 Green tea extract Grape seed extract
 Fish Oil EPA DHA
 Garlic extract
 L-tyrosine
 DHEA
 Prostate support Saw palmetto Cernitin® 5-Loxin® Nettle root
 extract Pygeum extract Lycopene Phytosterol complex Boron
 Rosemary extract

SEXUAL HEALTH

L-arginine Selenium Zinc Ginseng Ginger Ginkgo biloba extract

Dr. Shabsigh is director of the Division of Urology at Maimonides Medical Center in Brooklyn, New York, and associate professor of urology at Columbia University in New York City. He is board certified in urology and is coauthor of Sensational Sex in 7 Easy Steps: The Proven Plan for Enhancing Your Sexual Function and Achieving Optimum Health (Rodale, 2007). For more information, please visit www.shabsigh7steps.info.

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