

# Let's talk about SEX

The results are here - and they're far from tame! *The Australian Women's Weekly* has been talking sex with Aussie women for decades, and this brand new survey shows how we've changed (same-sex experimenting anyone?) and how some things stay the same. **Sheree Mutton** reveals all from our explosive poll.

*"I'm a great-grandmother and I'm having the best sex of my life," confesses Jennifer Blue, who is 61 years old and has been with her partner for one year. "I'm more comfortable now and I'm enjoying sex more than ever before."*

**J**ennifer is just one of the 1340 women who answered our recent survey questions to share what is really happening in the bedrooms of women around Australia. *The Australian Women's Weekly* Sex Survey discovered that 39 per cent rate their sex life as "good-excellent" (compared to 48 per cent in 2005) and more than a quarter say their sex drive is high to very high. Perhaps more surprising is the news that »



From left: Sex survey participants Elle Perring, Lee Ungaro and Jennifer Blue. Aged from 29 to 61, they are all currently in relationships.

HAIR AND MAKE-UP BY NICOLA JOHNSON. LEE WEARS H&M TOP. JENNIFER WEARS COS TOP AND WITCHERY JEANS. THESE IMAGES HAVE BEEN RETOUCHEE.

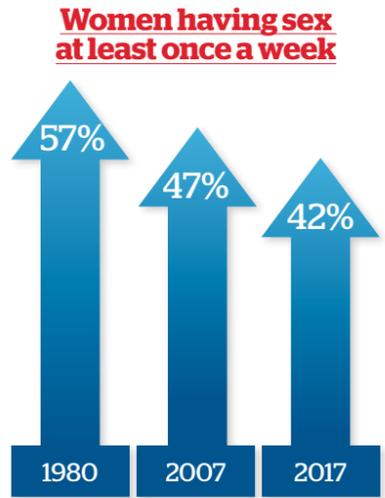
PHOTOGRAPHY ● KRISTINA SOLJO STYLING ● BIANCA LANE

19 per cent of us have had sex with someone we met online, many thanks to the rise of dating sites and apps such as Tinder.

“If women want to have sex, it’s now become easier than ever and they are able to do this without fear of judgement from others,” sexologist Dr Nikki Goldstein says. “The screen protects women to have some level of privacy when it comes to our sexual desires. Meeting online has become the norm but it’s also opened more sexual opportunities for women. I don’t think our desires were any less before, but there just weren’t as many opportunities to act on these desires.”

### Once a week

Despite this, it seems most of us are having less sex than in previous years. Our 2017 survey found that 42 per



cent of women have sex at least once a week compared to 47 per cent in 2007 and 57 per cent in 1980, while 30 per cent of women say they are currently not having sex at all. Why? Most

blamed stress, followed by lack of time. But that doesn’t necessarily mean we’re unhappy.

“This narrative that to have a happy relationship you need to be having sex two to three times a week, it’s rubbish,” says sex and relationship therapist Cyndi Darnell. “There are people who need to have sex six times a week to feel happy; there are people who don’t need sex at all and there are people who, for whatever reason, can’t have sex because of injury or disability or age.”

Dr Goldstein believes societal pressures are leading to a decline in intimacy among couples. “Women now have this pressure to achieve in their personal lives and professional lives and look amazing whilst doing it,” she says. “There are only so many hours in the day to work, to work out, to socialise, possibly have a family, a relationship and keep up with social media. When do we get the time to have great sex?”

### No need to be “Mrs”

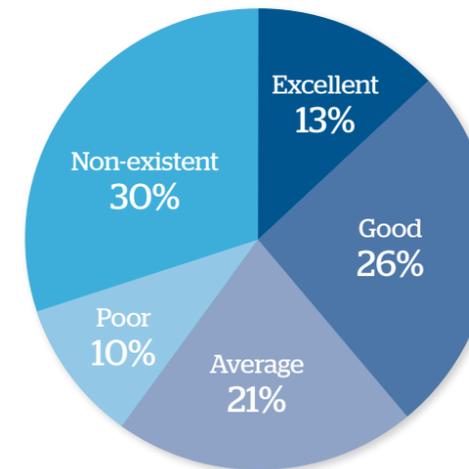
Our attitudes to premarital sex have certainly changed over the decades, with 87 per cent of women now believing sex before tying the knot is acceptable. Similarly, women are becoming more open to unconventional relationships – five per cent of women admit they have an open marriage.

“People are recognising the conventional model of sex and relationships we have been served up from previous generations is quite difficult to sustain long-term,” says Cyndi Darnell. “Women are more economically independent now; they are more educated now. They have more choices,” she adds. “I’m not saying the traditional model is bad but women are simply recognising that there are more options.”

### Cheating

Despite all the options available to us, it seems we’re a loyal lot, with only 10 per cent of women confessing that they have had an extra-marital affair (down from 22 per cent in our 2005 survey). Four per cent of us have considered it – down from 8 per cent

### How would you rate your sex life?



in 2005. Seven per cent said they had forgiven a partner for having an affair, while almost half (48 per cent) said it was and is a relationship breaker.

“I haven’t cheated on a partner and I’d like to think that I would be strong enough to leave a partner if they cheated,” says Elle Perring, 29.

And what about the popularity of the *Fifty Shades Of Grey* series? Dubbed “mummy porn” by some, the books certainly sparked a conversation among groups of friends about their sexual desires and fantasies, but did it cross into the bedroom? According to our survey 15 per cent of Australian women have tried this style of aggressively submissive sex, while a further 13 per cent have thought about it. Almost half (47 per cent) of Australian women want more adventurous sex.

“There will be women out there who are trying this [type of sex] because they have heard it spoken about and are now curious with a bit more permission,” says Dr Goldstein. “But there will be others who are trying it because they think it’s going to satisfy them because kinkier is best.

Whilst BDDSSM [bondage and discipline, dominance and submission, sadism and masochism] can be very pleasurable, those engaging in it just because they think they have to be kinkier and kinkier with their sexual experience might soon feel

### Elle Perring, 29.

“Two-thirds of my friends have met their partners online or are still dating online,” reveals Elle, who met her boyfriend online two years ago. “It’s harder to meet someone these days,” she adds. “But I am certainly surprised by the average number of dates [17] people have before having sex. I think my generation would consider that to be a lot.”

### By the numbers:

**8.3** The average number of sexual partners in a woman’s lifetime.

**49%** of women have faked an orgasm (up from 37% in 1980 and 32% in 2005)

**17%** have had a same-sex experience

**18%** of women are not sure if their partner has cheated on them.

**19%** have had sex with someone they have met online.

**77%** sometimes leave or always leave the lights off during sex.

**17** The average number of dates before having sex with your partner.

### Lee Ungaro, 46.

“I met my current partner online but I was a little bit unsure of online dating at first,” says Lee, who has two sons (born via IVF) from a previous long-term, same-sex relationship. “Online dating was very new to me,” she adds. “I am surprised at how many single women there are. Is it because of online dating, which is making it too easy to date but not commit? It’s easy to meet people but hard to have a long-term, meaningful and intimate relationship.”



disappointed as they will soon need to move on to the next taboo act.

“This is one of the problems with how we see sex. We are looking for the next taboo but have not even been able to grasp the basics,” she adds.

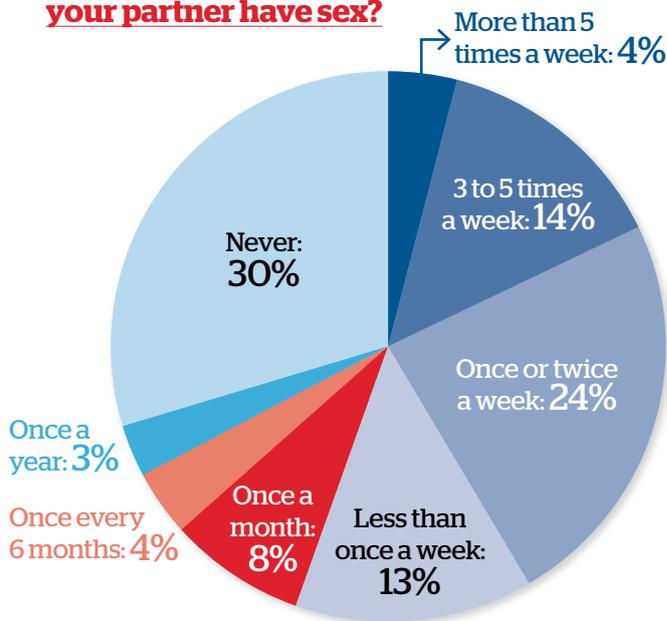
Darnell says while the erotic series didn’t fuel a sexual revolution, it did make it easier for women to explore and talk about other aspects of sex. “The book made people have conversations about sex that is not intercourse, and that was really great,” she says. »



### Jennifer Blue, 61.

*“Once I hit 40, I became really comfortable with sex. I had so much fun,” says Jennifer. “My generation never really talked about sex. There wasn’t any sexual education at home. It’s very different now. Sex is a natural thing and should be spoken about,” she adds. “I think tiredness is a big problem and impacts sex. It doesn’t matter what your age is.”*

### How frequently do you and your partner have sex?



### Sex talk

Dr Goldstein says communication with your partner is key to good sex. “It doesn’t mean just talking about your own sex life but sex in general,”

she says. “When you have sex with your partner it’s a time to reconnect. It can be a very intimate, close moment and it doesn’t matter what has gone on in the day, it’s time to be with them

in the most intimate way. The sex hormones released are also good for bonding and can help you be a happier couple if you focus and work on enjoying these moments more.” **AWW**

### Professor Kerry Phelps on:

#### 1 Prescription and non-prescription medications to improve your sex life



The sex survey found that 7 per cent of people had used prescription or non-prescription medications or natural products to stimulate their sex life. “There are many reasons why people look for help with their sex life from medication. It seems like an easy solution to an often complex problem,” says Professor Phelps. “Some sexual problems have a psychological basis. In other cases there is a physical problem like a hormone imbalance, menopause, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, prostate disease, a medication side effect and many others. In some cases sexual inexperience or technique

is an issue for a partner. You need to be aware that sexual problems may actually be relationship or compatibility problems which cannot be solved with a medication or supplement, and individual or couples’ counselling or a reconsideration of whether you are in the right relationship might be a better option.”

#### 2 Contraception

Our survey revealed the most popular form of contraception is the contraceptive pill (22 per cent) followed by condoms (15 per cent) and nothing (15 per cent). “The oral contraceptive pill is popular because it is convenient and reliable, and relatively inexpensive. It has the added advantage of cycle control and helps some women manage heavy or irregular periods. It can also simply be ceased when a woman decides she wants to get pregnant. Intra-uterine devices are also popular, particularly for women with

heavy periods. There have not been any significant practical changes in contraception for women over the past 10 to 20 years, but there have been improvements in the way existing methods are used. There have been promises of advances for male contraception but none has gone beyond the point of a suggestion.”

#### 3 Minimising the risk of a sexually transmitted infection

“Regardless of how you meet a new partner, consider your safety from an emotional, physical and sexual perspective,” advises Professor Phelps. “The most obvious risk is a sexually transmissible infection (STI). Ask your doctor about immunisation against human papillomavirus (HPV). Before starting a new relationship, have comprehensive STI testing and ask a new partner to do the same. If your partner is male, use condoms initially to reduce your risk of HIV and other STIs.”