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HOME

ABOUT LAST NIGHT

Q: I've battled depression all my life. Since going on antidepressants, the bouts have become less frequent and less intense, but I still have black days. All of this has affected my sex life. Before medication, visits from the black dog would be interspersed with highs, when my libido was on fire. Now, the peaks and troughs have been smoothed out, but I find myself slow to get aroused. Often, it is very difficult to achieve an orgasm, even with a vibrator. I dare not go back to those pre-meds days, but the idea of a life without passion is, itself, depressing.

A. Clinical depression is not a low mood that can be overcome by trying to cheer up. It is physiological. Sex therapist Dr Russell Stambaugh, from the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counsellors, and Therapists says: "In depression, the chemical soup often isn't right. The brain is important for sexuality because of the chemistry, but it's also important for ideas. It helps how you experience pleasure and how you define it."

People with chronic depression can experience a loss of desire, take longer to orgasm, and find sex less enjoyable. Dr Frederick Goodwin from America's National Alliance for Research on Schizophrenia and Depression says: "The whole process of sexual arousal starts with the ability to anticipate pleasure, which is lost with depression. People who are depressed are locked in the moment of their suffering."

Antidepressants can alleviate this suffering, but they can also lower libido. Satisfying sex can boost your mood and is important for relationships, but whatever is happening with your sex life, it's important to treat depression first. Address any sexual side effects later.

Melbourne-based sex and relationship therapist Dr Christopher Fox has seen many clients dealing with similar difficulties (sexlifetherapy.com.au). He says: "Depression depresses the libido. Depression meds also depress the libido. The depressed libido can depress the individual. This gives us the hopelessness often associated with the black dog. When depression hits, a person does not always

'feel' (or think) sexual. I often explain to clients to consider libido to be the upper areas of moods, along with high levels of happiness, or motivation. When a person is depressed, these areas of mood are harder to tap into. Antidepressants also help to bring the mood on to an even keel. If the lows are being brought up, the highs are being brought towards the centre as well."

While it might be tempting to ditch the medication, this is not a good idea. Depression can damage relationships. Fortunately, Dr Fox says all is not lost. He begins by looking at the strength of the relationship overall. Couples are better equipped to weather storms

"It's important to treat depression first."

when there is an underlying framework of goodwill and communication.

"I always discuss with clients how they have scaffolded their relationship. It's the little things that count and support the relationship. Communication and talking is one. When a couple's communication is good, it makes it easier to talk about sex.

"I suggest to couples that they find an object which can be used to assist initiation of sex. The object is only brought out when a partner wishes to have sex."

The object can be completely neutral – a scarf, a cushion, an ornament. It is better not to choose something overtly sexual. Do not bring out a box of vibrators.

"The other partner then has, let's say, 48 hours to continue the initiation. This then allows the partner time to think sex[ually]."

In a situation like yours, Dr Fox recommends seeking professional assistance from a sex therapist.

Email your questions to ablastnight@gmail.com



MAUREEN MATTHEWS

SAVVY SHOPPER



< RAISE YOUR GLASS

Sydney-based candle supplier Maison Balzac are slowly, but carefully, expanding their range beyond scented candles to include other beautiful homewares. Their coloured-glass drinking goblets are dishwasher safe and temperature resistant. Smoke large goblets (pictured), four for \$69, Maison Balzac, maisonbalzac.com.

> PRETTY IN PINK

If you want to bring a splash of colour to your home but a pink wall is too much of a commitment, consider the perfectly understated Fat Tulip armchair (pictured). Australian industrial designer Adam Goodrum created the beautifully proportioned chair, in just the right shade of pink. Fat Tulip armchair, \$4500, Cult Design, cultdesign.com.au.



< REST EASY

In Bed's flannel sheets are the perfect antidote to the chilly nights that remain before spring finally arrives. Woven from pure cotton, they have a soft and luxurious velvet finish. The winter colour range includes white, navy and light grey (pictured). Flat sheet from \$138, In Bed, inbedstore.com.

> A FAMILY AFFAIR

Sisters Maddie and Becc Sharrock, who founded Studio Twocan, create artworks and homewares from their Melbourne studio. They are conscious of the disposable nature of products. Their cement ceramics range, inspired by the Australian landscape, is designed to last a lifetime. Double hole vase number 3 (pictured), \$295, Studio Twocan, studio-twocan.com.au.



> BEAR NECESSITY

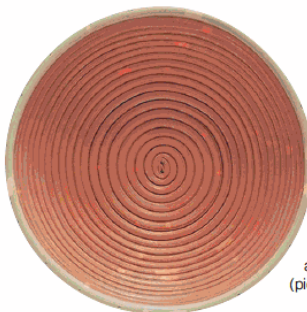
There are plenty of weird and wonderful things to be found at Fenton & Fenton, a homewares store known for furniture, art and design. This charming bear is actually a three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle that was designed and made in Brooklyn. Who says toys are for children?

Bear puzzle (pictured), \$120, Fenton & Fenton, fentonandfenton.com.au.



< HOME SWEET HOME

Designer Jackie Fazeka started homewares label Fazek in 2014 with a range of hand-painted and hand-printed linens and baskets. Her playful designs are made in her Melbourne studio. Fazeka is now on her third collection, Hands Up. The focus is on delightful rattan vessels, which are as practical as they are beautiful. Inside out large bowl (pictured), \$65, Fazek, fazek.com.au.



HOME

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GEORGIE GORDON

SOFT TOUCH

Linen merchants Hale Mercantile Co's products are produced from French flax and spun and dyed in Europe. Forget daggy tea towels, the soft and lush Flocca towels will bring a touch of luxury to any kitchen. As a bonus, they are designed to have maximum absorbency and longevity. Flocca linen waffle hand towel, \$65; bath towel, \$155; Bath sheet, \$219, Hale Mercantile Co, halemercantilecolinen.com.



< PAPER CHASE

Sydney designer Jessie James started Supply Paper Co because she could not find high-quality, durable paper goods. This workbook has perforated pages with a subtle, grey and white dot grid. It is designed to withstand all the folding, scribbling and dog-ear-ing you can muster. Pocket workbook, two for \$10, Supply Paper Co, supplypaperco.com.

> BRUSH WITH BEAUTY

Robert Malherbe, who was a finalist in this year's Archibald and Sulman Prizes, prefers to use models rather than photographs when he paints nudes. The intimacy he has with his subjects is evident in his art. Malherbe moved to Australia from Mauritius as a young boy and now paints from his studio in the Blue Mountains. Robert Malherbe's *Back of Nude* limited edition print (pictured), 68 x 51 cm, \$1000, contemporaryeditions.com.au.



TECHKNOW

MULTI-DEVICE WIRELESS KEYBOARDS

Reviewed by Adam Turner

If you're sick of typing on a slab of glass then it's time to throw a travel-friendly wireless keyboard into your carry bag.

The onscreen virtual keyboards on your smartphone and tablet might be fine for bashing out quick messages, but when you need to write something more substantial it helps to have a real keyboard at hand. These two Bluetooth keyboards are compact enough to slip into your carry-on luggage when you fly, so you can rest them on your tray table if you find yourself with enough elbow room to use a keyboard. When you're back at your desk you might plug your smartphone or tablet into a monitor and then use the Bluetooth keyboard to convert your handheld gadget into a makeshift desktop, although you'll need to add a wireless mouse.

Bluetooth wireless keyboards are designed to connect to practically any computer, smartphone or tablet. These two from Logitech and Microsoft stand out from the crowd because they let you connect to multiple devices and switch between them with a single button press. It's much less hassle than manually switching a Bluetooth keyboard between your various devices during the day.

THE VERDICT

The Microsoft keyboard clearly wins on portability, but its unusual design won't suit everyone. The Logitech may be the better choice if you don't mind its bulk and you'd take advantage of the slot to hold your smartphone or tablet upright.

CHECK THIS OUT

If you'll sometimes use your keyboard with a PC or Mac, consider opting for a larger Bluetooth keyboard with a built-in trackpad. Alternatively add a travel-friendly Bluetooth mouse to your carry bag, such as Microsoft's Arc Touch or Logitech's Marathon Mouse M705.

Logitech Bluetooth Multi-Device Keyboard K480
\$79.95



This Logitech keyboard has a slot at the top to hold your smartphone or tablet upright, although it's not adjustable if you're unhappy with the viewing angle. The keyboard is designed for easily switching between three Bluetooth devices, while the Microsoft keyboard only supports two. The trade-off is that the Logitech keyboard is bulkier, it weighs 1kg and its footprint is larger than a 9.7-inch iPad.

Microsoft Universal Foldable Keyboard
\$99.95



This Microsoft keyboard is about as wide as the Logitech but folds in half to make it more portable, and it weighs only 180 grams. It features larger keys than the Logitech but there's a gap in the middle and some of the keys are odd sizes, which may frustrate some people. The fact it folds upwards means you can't use it in your lap.



BEEP BICYCLE BELLS

Beep Bicycle Bells are adorable bike accessories that will spruce up your daily commute. Designed and hand-painted by Beep, an independent accessories company in Newtown, they are available in so many designs you're bound to find something that rings a bell. Favourites include collaborative projects with designers Trevor Dickinson, Ben Mitchell and Studio Cockatoo. As parents and lovers of the environment, Beep creators Jana Lindstrom and Steve Dubé hope to inspire more outdoor adventures. \$27.50, available from beepbells.com **LEISHA KAPOR**

