

# Tips to Improve Your Sex Life

## How to Enjoy More Fulfilling Sex



Whether the problem is big or small, there are many things you can do to get your sex life back on track. Your sexual well-being goes hand in hand with your overall mental, physical, and emotional health. Communicating with your partner, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, availing yourself of some of the many excellent self-help materials on the market, and just having fun can help you weather tough times.

## Enjoying a satisfying sex life

Sex. The word can evoke a kaleidoscope of emotions. From love, excitement, and tenderness to longing, anxiety, and disappointment—the reactions are as varied as sexual experiences themselves. What's more, many people will encounter all these emotions and many others in the course of a sex life spanning several decades.

### **But what is sex, really?**

On one level, sex is just another hormone-driven bodily function designed to perpetuate the species. Of course, that narrow view underestimates the complexity of the human sexual response. In addition to the biochemical forces at work, your experiences and expectations help shape your sexuality. Your understanding of yourself as a sexual being, your thoughts about what constitutes a satisfying sexual connection, and your relationship with your partner are key factors in your ability to develop and maintain a fulfilling sex life.

## Talking to your partner

Many couples find it difficult to talk about sex even under the best of circumstances. When sexual problems occur, feelings of hurt, shame, guilt, and resentment can halt conversation

altogether. Because good communication is a cornerstone of a healthy relationship, establishing a dialogue is the first step not only to a better sex life, but also to a closer emotional bond. Here are some tips for tackling this sensitive subject.

**Find the right time to talk.** There are two types of sexual conversations: the ones you have in the bedroom and the ones you have elsewhere. It's perfectly appropriate to tell your partner what feels good in the middle of lovemaking, but it's best to wait until you're in a more neutral setting to discuss larger issues, such as mismatched sexual desire or orgasm troubles.

**Avoid criticizing.** Couch suggestions in positive terms, such as, "I really love it when you touch my hair lightly that way," rather than focusing on the negatives. Approach a sexual issue as a problem to be solved together rather than an exercise in assigning blame.

**Confide in your partner about changes in your body.** If hot flashes are keeping you up at night or menopause has made your vagina dry, talk to your partner about these things. It's much better that he know what's really going on rather than interpret these physical changes as lack of interest. Likewise, if you're a man and you no longer get an erection just from the thought of sex, show your partner how to stimulate you rather than let her believe she isn't attractive enough to arouse you anymore.

**Be honest.** You may think you're protecting your partner's feelings by faking an orgasm, but in reality you're starting down a slippery slope. As challenging as it is to talk about any sexual problem, the difficulty level skyrockets once the issue is buried under years of lies, hurt, and resentment.

## Don't equate love with sexual performance

Create an atmosphere of caring and tenderness; touch and kiss often. Don't blame yourself or your partner for your sexual difficulties. Focus instead on maintaining emotional and physical intimacy in your relationship. For older couples, another potentially sensitive subject that's worth discussing is what will happen after one partner dies. In couples who enjoy a healthy sex life, the surviving partner will likely want to seek out a new partner. Expressing your openness to that possibility while you are both still alive will likely relieve guilt and make the process less difficult for the surviving partner later.

## Using self-help strategies

Treating sexual problems is easier now than ever before. Revolutionary medications and professional sex therapists are there if you need them. But you may be able to resolve minor sexual issues by making a few adjustments in your lovemaking style. Here are some things

you can try at home.

**Educate yourself.** Plenty of good self-help materials are available for every type of sexual issue. Browse the Internet or your local bookstore, pick out a few resources that apply to you, and use them to help you and your partner become better informed about the problem. If talking directly is too difficult, you and your partner can underline passages that you particularly like and show them to each other.

### Privacy concerns and Internet use

The Internet is a valuable source of all types of information, including books and other products (such as sex toys) that can enhance your sex life. Although it may be obvious, never use your workplace computer to do such searches, to avoid potential embarrassment with your employer, who is likely able to track your search history. People who feel uneasy even about using their home computers and credit cards to order sex-related information or products online might be able to find a nearby store (especially in major cities) and pay with cash.

**Give yourself time.** As you age, your sexual responses slow down. You and your partner can improve your chances of success by finding a quiet, comfortable, interruption-free setting for sex. Also, understand that the physical changes in your body mean that you'll need more time to get aroused and reach orgasm. When you think about it, spending more time having sex isn't a bad thing; working these physical necessities into your lovemaking routine can open up doors to a new kind of sexual experience.

**Use lubrication.** Often, the vaginal dryness that begins in perimenopause can be easily corrected with lubricating liquids and gels. Use these freely to avoid painful sex—a problem that can snowball into flagging libido and growing relationship tensions. When lubricants no longer work, discuss other options with your doctor.

**Maintain physical affection.** Even if you're tired, tense, or upset about the problem, engaging in kissing and cuddling is essential for maintaining an emotional and physical bond.

**Practice touching.** The sensate focus techniques that sex therapists use can help you re-establish physical intimacy without feeling pressured. Many self-help books and educational videos offer variations on these exercises. You may also want to ask your partner to touch you in a manner that he or she would like to be touched. This will give you a better sense of how much pressure, from gentle to firm, you should use.

**Try different positions.** Developing a repertoire of different sexual positions not only adds

interest to lovemaking, but can also help overcome problems. For example, the increased stimulation to the G-spot that occurs when a man enters his partner from behind can help the woman reach orgasm.

### The G-spot

The G-spot, or Grafenberg spot, named after the gynecologist who first identified it, is a mound of super-sensitive spongelike tissue located within the roof of the vagina, just inside the entrance. Proper stimulation of the G-spot can produce intense orgasms. Because of its difficult-to-reach location and the fact that it is most successfully stimulated manually, the G-spot is not routinely activated for most women during vaginal intercourse. While this has led some skeptics to doubt its existence, research has demonstrated that a different sort of tissue does exist in this location.

You must be sexually aroused to be able to locate your G-spot. To find it, try rubbing your finger in a beckoning motion along the roof of your vagina while you're in a squatting or sitting position, or have your partner massage the upper surface of your vagina until you notice a particularly sensitive area. Some women tend to be more sensitive and can find the spot easily, but for others it's difficult.

If you can't easily locate it, you shouldn't worry. During intercourse, many women feel that the G-spot can be most easily stimulated when the man enters from behind. For couples dealing with erection problems, play involving the G-spot can be a positive addition to lovemaking.

Oral stimulation of the clitoris combined with manual stimulation of the G-spot can give a woman a highly intense orgasm.

**Write down your fantasies.** This exercise can help you explore possible activities you think might be a turn-on for you or your partner. Try thinking of an experience or a movie that aroused you and then share your memory with your partner. This is especially helpful for people with low desire.

**Do Kegel exercises.** Both men and women can improve their sexual fitness by exercising their pelvic floor muscles. To do these exercises, tighten the muscle you would use if you were trying to stop urine in midstream. Hold the contraction for two or three seconds, then release. Repeat 10 times. Try to do five sets a day. These exercises can be done anywhere—while driving, sitting at your desk, or standing in a checkout line. At home, women may use vaginal weights to add muscle resistance. Talk to your doctor or a sex therapist about where to get these and how to use them.

**Try to relax.** Do something soothing together before having sex, such as playing a game or going out for a nice dinner. Or try relaxation techniques such as deep breathing exercises or yoga.

**Use a vibrator.** This device can help a woman learn about her own sexual response and allow her to show her partner what she likes.

**Don't give up.** If none of your efforts seem to work, don't give up hope. Your doctor can often determine the cause of your sexual problem and may be able to identify effective treatments. He or she can also put you in touch with a sex therapist who can help you explore issues that may be standing in the way of a fulfilling sex life.

## Maintaining good health

Your sexual well-being goes hand in hand with your overall mental, physical, and emotional health. Therefore, the same healthy habits you rely on to keep your body in shape can also shape up your sex life.

### Exercise, exercise, exercise

Physical activity is first and foremost among the healthy behaviors that can improve your sexual functioning. Because physical arousal depends greatly on good blood flow, aerobic exercise (which strengthens your heart and blood vessels) is crucial. And exercise offers a wealth of other health benefits, from staving off heart disease, osteoporosis, and some forms of cancer to improving your mood and helping you get a better night's sleep. Also, don't forget to include strength training.

**Don't smoke.** Smoking contributes to peripheral vascular disease, which affects blood flow to the penis, clitoris, and vaginal tissues. In addition, women who smoke tend to go through menopause two years earlier than their nonsmoking counterparts. If you need help quitting, try nicotine gum or patches or ask your doctor about the drugs bupropion (Zyban) or varenicline (Chantix).

**Use alcohol in moderation.** Some men with erectile dysfunction find that having one drink can help them relax, but heavy use of alcohol can make matters worse. Alcohol can inhibit sexual reflexes by dulling the central nervous system. Drinking large amounts over a long period can damage the liver, leading to an increase in estrogen production in men. In women, alcohol can trigger hot flashes and disrupt sleep, compounding problems already present in menopause.

**Eat right.** Overindulgence in fatty foods leads to high blood cholesterol and obesity—both

major risk factors for cardiovascular disease. In addition, being overweight can promote lethargy and a poor body image. Increased libido is often an added benefit of losing those extra pounds.

**Use it or lose it.** When estrogen drops at menopause, the vaginal walls lose some of their elasticity. You can slow this process or even reverse it through sexual activity. If intercourse isn't an option, masturbation is just as effective, although for women, this is most effective if you use a vibrator or dildo (an object resembling a penis) to help stretch the vagina. For men, long periods without an erection can deprive the penis of a portion of the oxygen-rich blood it needs to maintain good sexual functioning. As a result, something akin to scar tissue develops in muscle cells, which interferes with the ability of the penis to expand when blood flow is increased.

## Putting the fun back into sex

Even in the best relationship, sex can become ho-hum after a number of years. With a little bit of imagination, you can rekindle the spark.

**Be adventurous.** Maybe you've never had sex on the living room floor or in a secluded spot in the woods; now might be the time to try it. Or try exploring erotic books and films. Even just the feeling of naughtiness you get from renting an X-rated movie might make you feel frisky.

**Be sensual.** Create an environment for lovemaking that appeals to all five of your senses. Concentrate on the feel of silk against your skin, the beat of a jazz tune, the perfumed scent of flowers around the room, the soft focus of candlelight, and the taste of ripe, juicy fruit. Use this heightened sensual awareness when making love to your partner.

**Be playful.** Leave love notes in your partner's pocket for him or her to find later. Take a bubble bath together—the warm cozy feeling you have when you get out of the tub can be a great lead-in to sex. Tickle. Laugh.

**Be creative.** Expand your sexual repertoire and vary your scripts. For example, if you're used to making love on Saturday night, choose Sunday morning instead. Experiment with new positions and activities. Try sex toys and sexy lingerie if you never have before.

## Be romantic

Read poetry to each other under a tree on a hillside. Surprise each other with flowers when it isn't a special occasion. Plan a day when all you do is lie in bed, talk, and be intimate. The most important tool you have at your disposal is your attitude about sexuality. Armed with good information and a positive outlook, you should be able to maintain a healthy sex life for

# HelpGuide

many years to come.

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