

Guidelines to Revitalize and Maintain Sexual Desire

Adapted from Dr. Barry McCarthy, American University

1. The keys to sexual desire are positive anticipation and feeling you deserve sexual satisfaction in your intimate relationship.
2. Each person is responsible for his/her desire with the couple function as an intimate sexual team to nurture and enhance desire.
 - Revitalizing sexual desire is a couple task.
 - Guilt, blame and pressure interfere with revitalizing desire.
3. Inhibited desire and conflicts over desire discrepancies in a relationship are the most common sexual dysfunction
 - 1 in 3 couples is affected
 - Desire problems drain intimacy and good feeling from a relationship.
4. One in five married couples are sexual less than 10 times a year (McCarthy considers this a “non-sexual” marriage). One in three non-married couples who have been together 2 years or longer are “non-sexual.”
5. Initial period of romantic love and passionate sex typically lasts 6 months to 2 years.
6. Couples who are sexual have developed a functional sexual style that helps to maintain desire, intimacy, pleasuring and eroticism. This style must be congruent to the partners’ personalities, communication patterns and values.
7. Touching occurs both inside and outside the bedroom. Touching is valued for itself and does not always lead to intercourse. Five “Gears” of Touching:
 - First gear. Clothes on, affectionate touch (holding hands, hugging, kissing)
 - Second gear. Sensual touch involving non-genital touch that is clothed or nude. Head, back, foot rub; cuddling, cradling as you go to sleep or wake in the morning, a trust position where you feel safe and connected. This kind of touch can serve as a bridge to sexual desire.
 - Third gear. Playful touch that involves genital or non-genital touch, clothed or nude. Includes touching in the shower or bath, full-body massage, seductive or erotic dancing, strip poker. Anything that enhances a sense of playful pleasure.
 - Fourth gear. Erotic touch (most challenging). Erotic, non-intercourse touch can include manual, oral, rubbing or vibrator stimulation, erotic scenarios and playful unpredictability. It may be one-way or mutual and can proceed to orgasm or transition to intercourse.
 - Fifth gear. Intercourse. It is important to transition to intercourse only when high levels of erotic pleasure and expectation have been reached. Keep in mind that intercourse is a natural continuation of the pleasuring/eroticism process, not a pass/fail sex performance test.

8. Both partners value affectionate, sensual, playful, erotic and intercourse experiences, that is, the full range of touching.
9. Both partners are comfortable initiating touching and intercourse. Both feel free to say “no” and suggest an alternative way to connect and share pleasure.
10. Each develops ways to to bridge to sexual desire (individually and together). This involves ways of thinking, talking, anticipating and feeling that invite being sexual.
11. Sexuality’s positive functions in a relationship:
 - Shared pleasure
 - A way to reinforce and deepen intimacy
 - Reduce tension
 - Manage life’s stresses and relationship stress
12. Personal turn-ons that facilitate sexual anticipation and desire:
 - Fantasies
 - Special celebrations or memories
 - Sex with goal of pregnancy
 - Initiating a favorite erotic scenario
 - Being playful and spontaneous
 - Sex to celebrate success or soothe disappointment
13. External turn-ons that facilitate sexual anticipation and desire:
 - Videos (pornographic or not)
 - Music
 - Candles
 - Sex toys
 - Being sexual outside bedroom
 - Time away from children
14. Realistic expectations are crucial to maintaining a satisfying sexual relationship. It is self-defeating and harmful to demand equal desire, arousal, orgasm and satisfaction each time.
 - 35-45% of sexual experiences are very good for both partners
 - 20% are very good for one (usually the man) and fine for the other
 - 15-20% of sexual experiences are okay for one and the other finds it acceptable
 - 5-15% of sexual experiences are dissatisfying or dysfunctional.
 - Couples who accept occasional mediocre or dysfunction experience without guilt or blaming, and try again when they are open and responsive have vital, resilient sexual relationships.
15. Contrary to the myth that “horniness” occurs after not being sexual for weeks, desire is facilitated by a regular rhythm of sexual experiences. When sex is less than twice a month you can become self-conscious and fall into a cycle of anticipatory anxiety, tense and unsatisfying intercourse and avoidance.