

Your Guide to Great Sex

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Chapter 1: What It Takes

Great sex is near the top of, or at least on most peoples' list of what they wish to experience in their intimate relationships. Yet surprisingly, a great many of us are unaware of the conditions that predispose us to have deeply pleasurable sexual experiences. Simply being with someone who we find to be physically attractive probably won't be enough when we leave the infatuation stage. And just because sex is a "natural" experience, that doesn't mean that we will naturally be proficient in the art of love-making. Even being deeply in love with someone isn't necessarily enough to keep and brighten the spark of sexual pleasure over time.

So then what is?

Here are a few things that you might want to consider...

Attitude: This has to do with the perspective that we bring to our life experiences. In this case that means having the humility to be open, curious, and motivated to learn, and to challenge some of our preconceived ideas that may no longer serve us. It's being open to learning and discovery.

Safety: This has to do with feeling free from physical or emotional harm and willing to let down our defenses.

Trust: This is the confidence that our partner will relate to us with respect and consideration of our needs and feelings.

Honesty: The willingness to be truthful and sincere in our communication.

Responsibility: The awareness that it is within my power to influence the nature of my experience in any given situation without projecting blame or fault onto others.

Sensitivity: Being attuned and responsive to each other's desires and feelings.

Vulnerability: Being non-defensive and unguarded

Self-awareness: Being attuned and responsive to our feelings, thoughts and physical sensations.

Mindfulness: Full presence and attentiveness to full body experience.

Reciprocity: Creative interchange that is mutually fulfilling.

Non-distraction: Elimination of all distractions (people, phones, TV, electronic devices, etc.).

The following exercise provides some useful guidelines in regard to creating a meaningful and productive conversation about sex with a partner. Most couples do not talk enough about their sexual relationship and when they do, their conversations can feel uncomfortable, threatening, or embarrassing. Timing, setting and context of conversations dealing with sex are of vital importance. This is not to say that you shouldn't discuss things when your being intimate in bed, but the degree of vulnerability and sensitivity that many of us feel at those times can cause us to feel defensive to anything our partner says that can in any way be construed as criticism.

Exercise On Rating Your Level of Sexual Enjoyment

1. On a scale of 0-10 how would you assess your level of satisfaction and fulfillment with your current sex life? (0=couldn't be worse. 10=couldn't be better)
2. How do you account for this rating? What has been your part in being at your current level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction?
3. If it is less than a '10', what could you do to raise the number?

Setting the stage, intentionally, physically, and emotionally is just as important to the experience of great sex as is preparation is for a great wedding. Weddings are a one-day affair, but sex can be an ongoing and potentially ever-improving experience. Put the right conditions in place and the payoffs will continue for a lifetime!

Chapter 2: A Personal Inquiry

Exercise: A Personal Inquiry

Here are some questions that will help you to become freer to expand your ability to experience the sexual aspect of your life with greater depth, fulfillment, and passion. You can respond to these questions by thinking about them, writing about them, or having a conversation with someone with whom you can have a safe and comfortable dialogue. There are no "correct" or "incorrect" answers to these questions. They are simply intended to stimulate memories and feelings that will help you to experience greater clarity in regard to your associations with sexuality. Feel free to take as much time as you need to address these questions. They need not be answered in any particular sequence and you can revisit any of them as frequently as you like.

1. When did you first become curious or aware of physical differences between boys and girls?

2. As a child, did you experiment or play games that involved the exposure of private parts?
3. If you did play games, what role did you play (active initiator, dominant, receptive, passive, etc.)?
4. Did you ever “get caught” indulging your sexual curiosity as a child and if so, who caught you, and what was the consequence?
5. Describe the situation and the circumstances.
6. How did you feel as a result?
7. Did you decide anything about sex or yourself as a result and if so, what was it?
8. What did you decide about sex as a result of what you learned from your family of origin, spoken or unspoken?
9. Do you recall ever being shamed or humiliated for behaviors, thoughts or desires regarding sexuality and if so, by whom and how did that affect you?
10. As a child, did you ever observe or discover your parents or other adults involved in sexual activity? If so, describe the situation, how you felt, and how they handled it.
11. Did you ever have “the talk” about the birds and the bees? If so with whom?
12. Did you already know the facts of life or was this actually news to you?
13. If you already knew, where did your information come from?
14. What were the earliest messages (implicit and explicit) that you received as a child about sex (for example, it’s bad, it’s wrong, it’s dirty, it’s good, it’s sinful, it’s wonderful, it hurts, it’s only okay if...etc.)?
15. Who was or what were the primary sources of your understanding of sexuality (for example, parents, older sibling, the church, friends, books, etc.)?
16. Have you ever experienced sexual trauma (for example, rape, rough sex, forced sex, painful penetration, excessive coercion, etc.)?
17. If so, do you feel fully recovered?
18. If not, what do you think it would require to become more fully healed?
19. If you haven’t fully recovered from sexual trauma, how is your current sexual experience being affected by that incompleteness?
20. How would you rate yourself in terms of your level of open-mindedness regarding sexuality (0=extremely prudish, 10=anything goes)?
21. How comfortable are you with your current views about sex (0=very unhappy, 10=perfectly comfortable)?
22. What, if anything, in your sex life would you like to change or improve?

23. What are your positive associations with sexuality?
(Examples: relaxing, fun, playful, pleasurable, wonderful, passionate, nurturing, mysterious, caring, exciting, connecting, validating, transcendent).
24. What are your negative associations with sexuality? (Examples: confusing, guilt producing, scary, dirty, tradable commodity, anti-spiritual, shameful, unfinished business, secretive, control, compulsive.)
25. Have you felt used or exploited for another's sexual pleasure?
26. What conditions, if any, influence you to allow someone to violate your sexual boundaries?
27. How could you more effectively honor your sexual boundaries?
28. How comfortable are you in expressing your needs and desires during sex?
29. What would you have to be willing to risk in order to more clearly convey your needs and desires?
30. What might be the benefit in doing this?
31. Is there anything that scares you about sex? If so, what is it?
32. Is there anything regarding sex about which you feel guilt or shame? If so, what?
33. Are there things that you have done or that have been done to you that you haven't yet been able to forgive?
34. How flexible are you in terms of initiating a sexual experience versus being invited to it?
35. What aspect of sex do you find most pleasurable?
36. Describe in detail your favorite sexual fantasy.
37. What are the conditions that you need to have in place in order to have an optimal sexual experience?

Creating a fulfilling and healthy sex life is one of the best things that we can do to create a positive impact on our relationships and on our lives in general. Yet, because of deeply imbedded cultural taboos against discussing sexual issues openly, many of us feel embarrassed or even ashamed to disclose concerns about this aspect of our lives primarily because we may fear that doing so will cause us to be judged by others. Unfortunately keeping these concerns to ourselves only serves to amplify feelings of shame and guilt.

This process of self-inquiry is designed to assist you in recognizing and addressing some of the desires, needs, fears and concerns that relate to your sexual experience and breaking through any limiting beliefs that could be impairing your ability to maximize your full potential to experience the joy and pleasure of a fulfilling love life.

Chapter 3: Lovemaking Can Be Transformative

Sex can be a potent means of not only deepening and enhancing the connection in the relationship, but also strengthening the capacity to become a more loving person. Inherent in the sex act is the potential to become more sensitive, caring, feeling, and loving.

Lovemaking includes sex, but is not limited to it. Intimacy, sex, and lovemaking are three distinct experiences that may or may not occur simultaneously. Sex refers to the physical act of two people having physical genital contact, the primary intention being to produce stimulation and arousal. Lovemaking is driven by the intention to exchange affection and love through physical and emotional connection. It can be transformative to experience a radical shift in our experience in which we become more fully present and authentically ourselves.

Lovemaking is a dance of giving and receiving in which the ego is temporarily suspended. Making love becomes a physical manifestation of appreciation and gratitude towards each other. It's a way of expressing outwardly that which we are feeling inwardly.

Sometimes we make love. Sometimes we have sex. There is no right or wrong about either one. Lovemaking is motivated by a different intention than having sex and it brings about a different outcome. There is nothing wrong with having sex, but to the degree that we can consciously evoke the intention to bring love into our sexuality, we will be able to more fully realize the highest potential available through this act.

Because sex is an act of connection, it requires communication in order to exchange information in a process that requires ongoing feedback. The word communicate derives from the Latin "communicare" which means, "to join, unite or make common". The communication that needs to occur takes place not only during the sex act itself, but before and after it as well. And the form that the communication involves isn't just verbal, but can include touch, eye contact, and body language.

Creating an ongoing exchange of feedback enables us to express our desires in a way that allows for greater understanding of the moment-to-moment experiences arising within each partner. This permits each of us to adjust our responses in a way that may be more pleasing to each other.

The bedroom isn't the only place where the exchange of information can be beneficial to your sex life. Many couples have found that it can be helpful to communicate about their personal preferences when we are not being sexual since we may feel more relaxed at times when we're feeling less exposed (literally) and less vulnerable. While these conversations can sometimes feel awkward at first, like most other things, after

we've had more experiences in these conversations, we feel much more at ease and comfortable in having them.

No matter how much our partner loves us and cares about us, they can't read our mind. They need our feedback. Honest and respectful communication doesn't just enhance the quality of our sex life, but is a necessary component to any fulfilling relationship.

At first, these intimate conversations may feel awkward, but once the ice is broken and we experience the great benefit in sharing our deep desires, feelings and even fantasies, we begin to feel more comfortable and even enthusiastic about being collaborators in the creation of an increasingly fulfilling and mutually satisfying sex life. Practice doesn't make perfect but it often makes "easier" and more fun. And don't forget to enjoy!

Chapter 4: You Must Be Present To Win

Feelings, fantasies, or desires can enhance the quality of our sexual experience. They cause no harm to ourselves or others, and they often serve to make our inner life and our imagination richer and more interesting. They can, however, become problematic if they are obsessive or lead to inappropriate actions. Being in a committed partnership doesn't entitle someone to have sex whenever the urge arises. Sex is a shared consensual experience in which both partners offer themselves to each other freely and non-coercively. Whenever there are any elements of control, bargaining, or manipulation, the quality of the sexual experience is diminished for *both* partners. More significantly, the level of trust is diminished when compliance is coerced.

Many of us have been guilty at one time or another of sexual misconduct. We've played the game of being sexually coercive, or withholding sex in order to punish our partner, or manipulatively rewarding them for accommodating our wishes. When sex is used as a bargaining chip it loses its magic and becomes an instrument of the ego, rather than an expression of the heart. When this occurs there is a deterioration of the quality of the experience for both partners.

What distinguishes good sex from great sex is not the techniques that are utilized, but the quality of presence that each partner brings. Like the sign in the casino says, "You must be present to win", meaning that you've got to bring your full awareness into each moment, continually showing up and paying attention to what you are experiencing here and now, and attuning yourself to your partner's experience. It's not that stray thoughts and distractions don't show up occasionally and pull your attention away, but in being present there is a recognition of the moments in which you are *not* present, and in that awareness you can redirect your attention back to the present moment.

While being present may seem like something that should be simple and effortless, as anyone who has ever made the attempt to bring more mindfulness into their life knows, it can be anything but! Unlike most activities, this practice is *not* something that we *do*, but is something that we *be*. When our conditioned tendencies are geared towards *doing* what we think we need to do in order to *get* what we want, breaking the habit of focusing on behaviors rather than awareness usually take times and repetition.

It should be kept in mind that simply knowing what is necessary to bring greater presence and depth into our experience generally requires more time and practice than we think it should. We can find ourselves thinking: “I know that it’s better for me to be present than to let my attention jump all over the place”. Since this habit probably has been reinforced for many years, it can take longer than we expect it should for this change in our consciousness to translate into an actual shift in our behavior.

Try to be patient with the process. It’s worth the effort!

Chapter 5: Foreplay, Play, Orgasm, And Post-Orgasm

The act of lovemaking can be a great way to shift from a focus on the destination to the experience of the journey. It’s not about *getting* somewhere or something, but about enjoying the ride. When two people are fully present in the process of lovemaking, the experience is radically different than it is when one or both of them are somewhere else. You’ve got to bring more than your body to the game.

“Foreplay” has to do with everything that has gone on between the two of you since the last time you had sex and this time. It is not simply the prelude to a full sexual experience. It begins in the moment immediately following your last sexual encounter. Emotional intimacy is great foreplay. To the degree that there has been goodwill and loving kindness shared since your last encounter with each other, this experience will be much more likely to be mutually fulfilling.

Here are some things to keep in mind that might support that experience:

Know what turns you on, as well as what turns your partner on. If you don’t know, find out. You can’t tell your partner what you like if you don’t know what that is. The more you know about what brings you pleasure, the better you’ll be to know and communicate your desires.

Ask for what you want. None of us are mind readers. Our partner needs our feedback. Although expressing desires and needs does not guarantee that they will be fulfilled, it does make it more likely that they will be. Our feedback (verbal, sounds, and body language, etc.) gives our partner the information that they need in order for both of us to experience greater pleasure.

Handle “incompletions”. This term refers to unfinished business such as uncommunicated feelings such as disappointments, or resentments that need to be addressed in order to clear the decks of unresolved issues. When unfinished business gets finished, underlying resentments get released and feelings of openness, vulnerability, and appreciation replace them.

Anticipation is part of the fun. Just thinking about what’s coming up can be a turn-on. E-mailing, texting, leaving sexy voice mails, or notes that give previews of coming attractions are a few examples of priming the pump.

Strengthen your orgasm muscles. Kegels are the classic exercise for women who want to transform feeble orgasms into powerful ones. Locate these muscles in your pelvic floor by stopping yourself from peeing midstream. Then tone them by clenching when you’re not peeing. This exercise is good for men too.

Practice delaying orgasm. The more we prolong the arousal phase of sex, the bigger the explosion. Slow down and enjoy. When you feel close to orgasm, cool slightly and bring things down to a simmer. Then slowly build back up and repeat as many times as you can stand to, then let go!

Be fully present. Yes we’ve said this before but it bears repeating. Show up!

Use your breath to manage your sexual energy. If you breathe in tandem with your partner, you can slow the rush toward orgasm and create a bigger build up, which will intensify pleasure.

Hit the hot spots. Don’t be afraid to experiment.

Explore erotica. Erotic movies, videos, and books can be tasteful and arousing.

Enjoy the afterglow. This will help you to remain awake, which can sometimes be easier said than done, particularly after an intense sexual encounter. Resisting the temptation to immediately fall asleep can produce rich dividends in your relationship, even if there is only a very brief reconnection after your climax. Take advantage of the openheartedness that orgasm produces. Sharing a few kind, loving words can be enough to satisfy the need for closure.

Relax. Studies report that stress can severely compromise one’s sex drive. Make time for pleasure. Enjoy the process and the closeness whether you have an orgasm or not. There is always another day.

Get help if you need it. If you are not orgasmic or have low levels of desire, advice from a professional may be helpful. Many types of medications diminish sexual responsiveness and desire. If you are taking medication, check with your doctor to see if you meds could be inhibiting your sexual experience. Nerve damage or low testosterone could also be the problem. Get a thorough medical evaluation. You can also consult a licensed sex therapist by getting a referral from a trusted therapist, doctor, clergyman, or friend or check with the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists (AASECT) or the American Academy of Sexologists.

Integrating these suggestions won't guarantee that you and your partner will experience mind-blowing sex, but they will make that possibility more likely. Get wild! Don't be afraid to experiment. What may seem strange or quirky today may feel exciting and delightful next month or next week or tomorrow. Give it a shot and see what happens. You might be surprised. Pleasantly surprised!

Chapter 6: 5 Varieties Of Sex

There is no "correct" way to have sex. There are many varieties of sexual experience that may feel "right" to us at any given time. And variety is, as they say, the spice of life. Knowing what the possibilities are and that you aren't limited to any one of them, and remembering that you have the power to choose which ever type of sexual experience you are up for at any given time is one of the best ways to avoid the pitfall of an uninspired sex life.

Here is a partial list of some of the more well-known varieties of sexual experience:

The standard or "**meat and potatoes sex**" variety (or "tofu and sprouts" for those who favor vegetarianism) is also known as "**maintenance sex**." It's the old standby: in the bedroom, in the bed, with the old tried and true positions and techniques that work. Not particularly exciting, but it gets the job done.

Next is what we call "**junk food sex**," also known as the "**quickie**." The inclusion of this practice in one's overall sexual repertoire can produce short but nonetheless pleasurable results. This variety tends to be more popular with those of the male persuasion, but there are also quite a few women who enjoy sex in this form. A steady diet of it, however, tends to be low on nutrients.

"**Gourmet dining sex**", also known as "**romantic sex**," is designed to produce delicious, relaxed, extended periods of deeply pleasurable experiences of emotional and physical intimacy characterized by full-body stimulation, lots of eye contact, and uninterrupted shared presence. Enhancements to gourmet sex can include soothing music, bathing together, candlelight, and any other elements that enrich the experience.

"**Hot chili pepper sex**" also known as "**adventurous sex**" is definitely for those who enjoy the exploration into the further reaches of sexual experimentation in the territory between discomfort and pleasure. It is not for the faint of heart. The rule is that there are no rules here, other than the requirement that both partners be in agreement with whatever is being done at any given time and that either one has the power to stop things at any moment without resistance from the other. Changing the location or setting of a sexual encounter can also serve to enhance the nature of the experience. All

manner of costumes and sexual accessories are welcome and you are limited only by your imagination.

And last, but certainly not least is “**ambrosia**” or “**sacred sex**”. This has to do with the practice of devotion to the divine through the expression of shared sensory bliss. Ambrosia is food and nectar for the gods, which ensured their immortality. Sacred sex takes us into the realm of the timelessness of full presence. It involves anything that tastes and smells delicious, and can include items that awaken the senses such as meditative music, bathing, essential oils, scented candles, incense, and silks. This practice often focuses on the holding back of orgasm to prolong pleasure, and plentiful time for heightened stimulation. It may also include chanting, breathing techniques, sounding mantras, paired yoga poses, massage, and the maintaining of eye contact throughout the entire length of the experience.

Knowing the nature of our sexual desire at any given time and being willing to express that preference without strong attachment or coercion is an essential element in the process of being proactive in the fulfillment of our sexual needs. The more willing we are to honor these needs, the more likely we will be to have the kind of sexual experience that we truly desire.

Chapter 7: Setting The Stage For Sexual Intimacy

*“Even people who look forward to being sexual with their partner must go through a transition from responsibility to pleasure.” --Esther Perel, author of *Mating in Captivity**

Over time, the desire for love-making can begin to diminish. The competing urgencies of our life can claim more of our time with careers, household tasks and children being the recipient of our best energy. It takes a strong intention and a firm commitment to keep love alive and to manage the many demands of life.

Transitioning from the identity of responsible, disciplined and controlled causer of results, to the playful, creative, out of control, wild, euphoric, wonder filled, passionate adventurer is so good for us. When taking on the challenge of regularly setting aside the roles of roommates, business partners, and co-parents to be lovers to reinforce the pleasure bond, we are making a wise choice. We can strengthen this commitment by reminding each other of how we have delighted in the deep pleasure of love-making and making a conscious agreement not to neglect this domain of our relationship.

How much we long to experience that again and taking time to remember the deep pleasure of bringing erotic sensation to each other is a primary way of keeping the vitality of the relationship high. The commitment to transition from the world of responsibility, work and results to sexual play is both physically pleasurable and

beneficial for the relationship by keeping the bond strong. Keeping the erotic charge operative can only result from willful intent. If you are intentional, you may already be doing some of the recommendations offered here. There is always more that we can add to spice up the essential erotic connection.

- A spoken agreement with our partner to make the sensual connection a regular feature of the partnership
- Carving out of stone, if need be, to make sufficient time for lovemaking even if other important people and tasks must wait for our attention
- Thinking sexy thoughts to start savoring the pleasure and to prime the pump by perking up sexual energy anticipating being with our lover
- Leaving sexy voice mail messages, email and text messaging to flirt with our partner
- Emotional intimacy and sharing from the heart is great foreplay
- Risking sharing sexual fantasies will give you both ideas to play with
- Adventure is being willing to be experimental and try new things, even if they are a bit edgy because the best long-term romantic partnerships are characterized by continually bringing novelty into their relationship (if things get too edgy, you can always have a safe word to stop)
- The set and setting can enhance romance, candles, a red light, music, poetry, silky sheets, evocative scented oils and lotions
- Generosity of spirit is finding out what turns our partner on and when ever possible, helping them to get all that they desire
- Being a gracious receiver by being the happy recipient of their generosity of spirit and letting them know our gratitude
- Full body touch and home made massage lengthen and heightens the sensual experience.

Enjoy!

Chapter 8: Beware The Dangers Of Invisible Obstacles

The pleasure of lovemaking is often so intense at the beginning of a relationship that it can seem inconceivable that it could ever get old. And yet as most of us have discovered, even the most ecstatic feelings of infatuations eventually can and usually do fade. While it is inevitable that the intensity of a new love diminishes, that need not spell the end of sexual pleasure. Yet for many couples, it does. While some couples are able to resuscitate their feelings of passion when the flame of desire begins to cool, others are unable to do so. Try as they may, they are unable to re-ignite the sexual fires that once

were so present in their relationship. At these times, what is required is a firm and powerful intention to meet this challenge with a shared commitment to restore lost passion to its rightful place in the relationship.

Taking a stand to create a deeply fulfilling sex life can however, activate hidden obstacles that may have been hindering our ability to unconditionally give ourselves fully to this commitment. We call these hindrances “competing commitments”. Competing commitments are other desires or needs that we are usually unaware of that are at odds with our conscious intentions. For example, although I may consciously desire a better sex life, I may have an unconscious commitment to avoid certain types of sexual practices. Or they may dampen my willingness to feel too much sexual pleasure if I fear that my religion or family values would be disapproving. When we tell ourselves that we really want to dedicate more time and energy to having greater sexual pleasure but continually find that for some reason that just doesn’t seem to be happening, it’s always a good idea to check out the possibility that there may be competing commitments that are sabotaging our efforts. Becoming aware of these unrecognized intentions and bringing them into our conscious mind can begin to defuse some of their power to inhibit our desires and free us to give ourselves permission to “go for the gold”.

Another factor that can interfere with our ability to more fully engage in and enjoy our sexuality is the presence of what we refer to as “incompletions”. Incompletions or “unfinished business” refers to unresolved issues that are present in our relationship that inhibit our ability to feel love and desire towards our partner. When business is unfinished and swept under the rug or ignored, it doesn’t go away. Instead, it slowly festers below the surface of our awareness, deteriorating into grudge holding, a refusal to forgive, detachment, and resentment. These feelings and attitudes can severely diminish, or even destroy the feelings of love and desire that fuel the intention to give and receive pleasure and affection in our relationship. When incompletions are not addressed, the result can be long-term or permanent alienation in the relationship. The longer we wait to address them, the more difficult the healing process can be.

The best way to handle incompletions is to not create them in the first place. The way to prevent the occurrence of incompletions is to acknowledge and address differences and breakdowns when they arise. The resistance to doing this often is due to a fear that doing so could “open a can of worms” and that things could quickly go downhill, particularly if one or both partners is unskilled in managing differences. In such cases, we strongly recommend that partners learn how to effectively deal with differences by availing themselves to the resources that are widely available, such as books, courses, seminars and workshops that can be attended in person or on-line. At times it can be helpful or even necessary to call in the guidance of a professional counselor, educator or

therapist to facilitate a completion process that can address unacknowledged or unaddressed issues.

When we fail to prevent incompletions from occurring the best thing to do is to tell the truth and acknowledge what it is that we have been withholding from our partner (and perhaps even from ourselves) and deliver that information in a respectful way. Doing so may feel daunting. After all, if we were not at least somewhat fearful of the consequences, we probably would have done so in the first place. These conversations can be difficult and can sometimes get emotional, depending on the seriousness of the incompleteness. Bringing in a trusted third party may be helpful or necessary. The sooner you bring things out in the open, the better the chances are for a recovery of trust and love to replace distance, resentment and detachment. Often these repairs cannot only restore connection in a damaged relationship, but can actually make things even stronger at the broken places.

When repairs are successful and barriers are no longer present, the motivation and intention to invest fully in the sexual aspect of your relationship is powerful and strong. When we have cleared the deck of the invisible obstacles that have blocked our way to a more passionate sex life, we're travelling light and feeling the freedom that comes with being fully present, open-hearted, and confident that we are worth having all of our needs met, including our need to experience the joy of ecstatic love-making. And it doesn't get much better than that!

Chapter 9: Sex, Health, And Longevity

A great sex life can not only provide great pleasure but can also strongly impact the quality of our physical well-being and health. Of course we don't need reassurance from medical science to be motivated to more fully enjoy sex, but it helps to know that it provides us with more than delightful sensations. It enhances the quality of our lives and this benefits everyone we touch, physically and emotionally. There is a lot of evidence from scientific research that tells us that there are tremendous health benefits when we enjoy a life that is rich in fulfilling sexual experiences. For example:

- Sex provides a good cardiovascular workout, which is healthy for your heart and blows lots of oxygen into the brain.
- It's an amnesiac, so you're not remembering that a little while ago you had been irritated at your partner or why.
- It's also an analgesic, so if, for instance you have recurring back or neck pain, you temporarily forget it or don't experience it at all while you're in a state of sexual arousal.

- It stimulates the production of pleasure-inducing hormones and chemicals, like oxytocin.
- People who experience frequent and pleasurable sex live longer and healthier lives, have fewer hospitalizations, and take fewer medications than people who don't.
- Sex is a great self-esteem builder.
- And it's a great way to show love.

It's possible to enjoy sex well into our later years. Maintaining good physical and emotional health is one of the best things that we can do that will enable us to enjoy a robust sex life. Surprisingly, it's hardening of the attitudes, not hardening of the arteries that is one of the biggest factors in diminishing our sexual pleasure. Buying into commonly-held myths like, "sex inevitably gets boring after decades with the same person" or "old people don't have sex", or "certain types of sex are appropriate and others are disgusting", puts a real damper on our ability to experience the full range and depth of sexual enjoyment throughout life. What matters most about sexual play is whether or not the participants are mutually consenting adults.

A great many of the seniors whom we've known have assured us that they have found from their own experience, that it is not only possible to enjoy sex well into our ninth and even tenth decades, but that the pleasure of the experience can be even greater than it was in our younger days. As the saying goes, the most erogenous zone in your body is your brain. Use it to create mind-blowing experiences in bed, or in whatever other place you choose.

As one sexy octogenarian told us not too long ago, "My body isn't what it used to be. I've had to make some adjustments, but the pleasure is still there. In fact, in some ways it's greater than it was when I was younger and so hormonally driven. Aging has its benefits and one of them is to be relieved of the need to be the world's best lover. What I love most about making love now is the amount of joy that I get from the pleasure that I can give my wife. I just love to love her. It just doesn't get much better than that at my age, or at any age!"

Chapter 10: Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude

If you've ever wondered why some couples are able to experience red-hot sex after fifty years of marriage, while others who have only been together for five years seem to have lost that loving feeling, you're not alone. One of the most frequently asked questions we get from our clients and readers is that very question. And as you might guess, the answer is, "it's complicated", which actually means that there's no single, simple answer.

There are of course multiple factors that influence the process of establishing, maintaining, and growing a passionate relationship. One of them, perhaps the most underappreciated one, is **appreciation** itself. Or to be more specific, the willingness to experience, express, and show gratitude to one's partner, in particular in regard to the joy and pleasure that he or she experiences through the sexual aspect of their relationship.

The word "appreciate" means three things:

- (1) To recognize the value of something
- (2) To feel gratitude
- (3) To increase in value

When we show **appreciation** through our words or actions we are not only expressing that we value something (or someone), but we are actually *increasing* its value. Just as the value of a home can appreciate over time, we can be an active agent in increasing the value of our sex life. And just as a home doesn't necessarily increase in value and may even *depreciate* if it is not adequately maintained, our sex life will fail to appreciate if it is neglected.

There are of course, other factors that contribute to the strengthening or weakening of our level of sexual fulfillment, many of which we have addressed in this book, but the importance of the role played by the exchange of positive feedback in this area is all too often underestimated. When we express these feelings through our words and actions it can quickly become evident how impactful they can be on the quality of our relationship.

In practicing these exchanges we become more aware of feelings of appreciation that arise within ourselves and tend to act on or speak from them on a more frequent basis. Not surprisingly, those who create this positive cycle of communication seem to have much better than average sex lives.

If you want to experience the benefit of becoming a champion appreciator, consider some of the things that you can do or say such as:

“Thank you for working out at the gym to keep your body in good shape.”

“I’m so glad that you are open to experimentation to keep our sex life lively.”

“I desire you, and I find you very sexy and attractive.”

“I love the respectful way you touch me.”

“You are a champ at tuning into the moves that light me up.”

“I’m so happy that I don’t always have to be the one initiating sex.”

“I love it when you invite me to bed.”

“Thank you for being strong and confident enough to take my cues into consideration and respond to what I desire.”

“I love it that you’re almost always available for love-making when I feel the urge.”

“Yum, that was some great love making.”

“Thank you for being such a devoted lover.”

When our partner notices and expresses appreciation for even the smallest actions (a hug, wink, a pat, or a sensual kiss) it shows that they never take the relationship for granted.

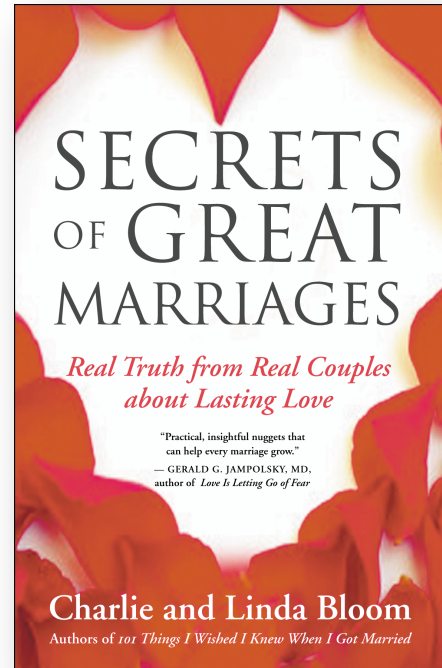
When both partners are committed to this sincere and honest verbal play, the sparkle can last a lifetime. Their shared commitment to a positive exchange of erotic generosity generates its own momentum and becomes self-perpetuating. When this cycle is in place, the quality of their sex life spirals upward and the sky’s the limit!

“The Blooms have captured the essence of true partnership and what it involves. This book provides compelling evidence that no matter who we are , we can develop the skills to develop the skills to create truly extraordinary relationships.”

- **Marianne Williamson**, author of *A Return to Love*

This book, co-written by therapists Charlie and Linda Bloom contains interviews with 27 couples who had been together an average of over thirty years and seemed as happy as newlyweds.

The Blooms found that they had all experienced a wide range of marital and life challenges, including infidelity, difficulty with children and step-children, addiction, war wounds, and financial ruin, yet somehow managed to not only sustain their marriages, but actually deepened their bond of love through, not despite their ordeals. Their stories show how couples can co-create deeply mutually fulfilling relationships not despite their ordeals, but through them!



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About the Authors

Linda Bloom, LCSW and Charlie Bloom, MSW are the authors of the best-selling book, ***101 Things I Wish I Knew When I Got Married: Simple Lessons to Make Love Last*** and ***Secrets of Great Marriages: Real Truth from Real Couples about Lasting Love; Happily Ever After...and 39 Other Myths about Love: Breaking Through to the Relationship of Your Dreams***, and their latest book, ***That Which Doesn't Kill Us: How One Couple Became Stronger at the Broken Places***, the story of Linda and Charlie's ten-year journey that took them through a series of ordeals that crippled their family and nearly destroyed their marriage.



Trained as psychotherapists and relationship counselors, they have worked with individuals, couples, groups, and organizations since 1975. They have lectured and taught at learning institutes throughout the USA, including the Esalen Institute, the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, 1440 Multiversity, the California Institute for Integral Studies, the Meridian University, John F. Kennedy University, the Crossings, Omega institute, the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology, Sonoma State University, University of California at Berkeley Extension Program, the Hoffman Institute, and the World Health Organization. They have offered seminars throughout the world, including Bhutan, Cuba, China, Japan, Indonesia, New Zealand, Denmark, Sweden, India, Brazil, and many other locations.

Linda and Charlie have been married since 1972.

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Your Guide to Great Sex

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