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The Naked Truth |

How to get turned on, why you don’t need to be a sex god, and the value of ‘maintenance sex’

- From visiting an adult sex shop together to a night on the dance floor, there are many ways for long-term couples to turn up the heat
- It is important to be in the mood because it allows for a more intimate connection, says a clinical psychologist and sex therapist

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If you’re in the mood, you’re more likely to be fully engaged in sex – and your partner will enjoy you more as well. Photo: Alamy

People in long-term, committed relationships often find themselves stuck in daily routines or too preoccupied to have any spare capacity for engaging in intimate relations with their partner, whether physical or emotional.

When you are exhausted, it is understandable you won’t have any sexual desire or be in any state of mind for deeper interaction.

However, people in a new relationship naturally find it much easier to get in the mood because they are entranced by their partner due to the novelty of the relationship. Many colloquially refer to this as the “honeymoon period”, and this phase can vary from anything from a few months to a year.

There are different ways to feel turned on and be “in the mood”. There is the “spontaneous desire” that occurs out of the blue, the kind that makes you “raring to go” on a physical, emotional and psychological level. This desire has a tendency to manifest on its own, according to Dr Kristin Zeising, a clinical psychologist and certified sex therapist.



Treating sex like a whole “menu” of things you can create for each other exclusively, such as a shower together, can help couples get creative. Illustration: Henry Wong

Many women are familiar with the “responsive desire” where they need a highly erotic context to feel aroused, which means their reactions are influenced by circumstances and situations.

Sometimes the triggers can be psychological or emotional, making one feel close to their partner initially and then evolving into a desire to be physically intimate. In this case, their body may not be showing the physical manifestations of arousal but their mind is certainly ready, Zeising says.

“Some women notice that they will begin sexual interaction, but this is not to say that they are emotionally or physically invested. They have merely made the decision to try to engage. But then their body starts to get physically aroused, regardless of their emotional state. It is because their body informs them that it’s enjoying the interaction and then their brain catches up.”

It is important to be in the mood because it makes us more available for intimate connections and more likely to have fun, she adds. “If you’re in the mood, you’re more likely to be fully engaged in sex. And your partner will enjoy you more as well.”

Besides common mood killers such as daily chores and routines, work stress, exhaustion, depression, and anxiety, you also need to avoid holding on to any past resentment, frustrations or old hurts towards your partner.



Dr Kristin Zeising, a clinical psychologist and sex therapist based in Hong Kong.

Furthermore, try not to focus too much on how to be the perfect lover; equally you should not fixate on turning your partner into an idealised “sex god”. Instead, concentrate on the connection and presence and less about perfect techniques.

Another common spoiler is “spectatoring”, which is focusing on what your body is or isn’t doing and how it is responding rather than just enjoying the sensations and letting go in the moment, Zeising says.

To turn the heat up, learn to stoke your own erotic fire such as reading erotica or using sexual fantasy to experience with your partner. A positive attitude also goes a long way. It is crucial to feel healthy in your body, and this can be achieved through simple means like eating well and exercising regularly. You are more likely to feel sexy when you are coming from a place of self love, Zeising says.



Sensual massages help couples put the focus on touch and not having sex. Photo: Alamy

Furthermore, having a healthy attitude also means a mindset shift about sex. Instead of thinking of it as a burden, chore or duty, make a mental note to remember those times in which you really enjoyed sex with your partner, or the glow you felt right afterwards, Zeising says.

Occasionally, we can still enjoy a satisfying sex life when we are not in the mood. There are plenty of times when you may not be in the mood when your partner is, or neither of you may be but feel it’s important to have sex to maintain an intimate bond.

“Many couples in long-term relationships have ‘maintenance sex’ to keep the bond going, have a sexual release, or just to experience the warmth of their partner’s touch. This is not the hot and heavy sex, but it’s not any less valuable,” Zeising says.

“If you treat sex like a menu, where there are many different ways to be sensual, erotic and sexual, there may be other behaviours that can be pleasurable without having to engage in sexual intercourse or having to feel ‘on’. Remember, sex is not just intercourse and performance. It’s way more broad than that; it’s whatever you find pleasurable.”



A night out dancing can do wonders for a couple's sex life. Photo: Alamy

For men, stress is a major factor that can affect sex drive and desire.

“One of the more important things for men is that you don’t put pressure on them to perform. Feeling respected is number one – they want to see their partner is ready and interested for sex, and that they are not a charity case,” Zeising says.

“Men tend to have an easier time getting themselves in the mood. However, just like women, they should pay attention to what gets them in the mood and communicate that to their partners.”

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Sex does not need to be a marathon; it can be a quickie or can consist of taking turns to please each other. Photo: Alamy

Showing respect and maintaining communication are essential for a healthy sex life, Zeising adds.

“Remaining respectful, kind, and compassionate towards your partner is important. If your relationship is suffering with negativity, you’re very unlikely to want to have sex with that person. Talking about sex can be erotic in itself. Hearing your partner explain the sexual things they like or their fantasies, when you normally don’t hear these words coming from their mouth, can be very sexy.”

Getting in the mood

Zeising gives some tips on priming for passion.

1. Dancing together can sync your bodies and help spark sexual energy
2. Visiting an adult sex store together where you can pick out toys or outfits can be fun and sexy
3. Sensual massage puts the focus on touch and not having sex
4. Prioritise each other and your sex life; pay attention to each other sexually and foster the connection
5. Be creative and open with what is considered sex; think about a whole “menu” of things you can create for each other exclusively, such as a shower together
6. Sex does not need to be a marathon; it can be a quickie or can consist of taking turns to please each other
7. Exercising with your partner can be a turn-on
8. Encourage each other to have fulfilling lives outside the relationship because a happier person is a sexier person

Luisa Tam is a senior editor at the Post