

# Revitalizing and Maintaining Sexual Desire

Adapted from "Sex Made Simple" by Barry McCarthy, Ph.D.

- 1) **The key to sexual desire is positive anticipation and feeling you deserve sexual pleasure in your intimate relationship.**
- 2) **Each person is responsible for his/her desire with the couple functioning as an intimate sexual team to nurture and enhance desire.** Revitalizing sexual desire is a couple task. Guilt, blame, and pressure subvert the change process.
- 3) **Inhibited desire and conflicts over desire discrepancies are the most common sexual problems, affecting one in three couples.** Desire problems drain intimacy and good feelings from your relationship.
- 4) **One in five married couples has a non-sexual marriage (being sexual less than ten times a year).** One in three non-married couples who have been together two years or longer has a nonsexual relationship.
- 5) **The initial romantic love/passionate sex/idealization relationship phase lasts less than two years and often only six months.** Desire in an ongoing relationship is maintained by developing a comfortable, functional couple sexual style.
- 6) **The essence of sexuality is giving and receiving pleasure oriented touching.** The prescription to revitalize and maintain sexual desire is intimacy, pleasuring, and eroticism.
- 7) **Touching occurs both inside and outside the bedroom.** Touching is valued for itself and does not always lead to intercourse.
- 8) **Couples who maintain a vital sexual relationship can use the metaphor of touching consisting of "five gears" (dimensions).** First gear is clothes on, affectionate touch including hugging, kissing, holding hands. Second gear is sensual touching. Sensual touch includes non-genital body massage, cuddling on the couch, and touching while going to sleep or on awakening. Third gear is playful touch which intermixes genital and non-genital touch, can be clothed or unclothed, romantic or erotic dancing, touching while in the bath and shower, whole body massage, playing strip poker or Twister. Fourth gear is erotic touch (manual, oral, rubbing, or vibrator stimulation) to high arousal and orgasm for one or both partners. Fifth gear integrates pleasurable and erotic touch that flows into intercourse. Intercourse is a natural continuation of the pleasuring/ eroticism process. Intercourse is not a pass-fail sex test.
- 9) **Both the man and woman value affectionate, sensual, playful, erotic, and intercourse experiences.**
- 10) **Both the woman and man are comfortable initiating touching and intercourse.** Both feel free to say "no" and suggest an alternative way to connect and share pleasure.
- 11) **A key strategy is to develop "her," "his," and "our" bridges to sexual desire.** This involves ways of thinking, talking, anticipating, and feeling that invite being sexual.

- 12) **Sexuality has a number of positive functions for your relationship—a shared pleasure, a means to reinforce and deepen intimacy, and a tension reducer to deal with the stresses of life and the relationship.**
- 13) **The average frequency of sexual intercourse is from four times a week to once every two weeks.** For couples in their twenties, the average is two to three times a week, and for couples in their fifties once-twice a week.
- 14) **Personal turn-ons (special celebrations or memories, feeling caring and close, erotic fantasies, anniversaries or birthdays, sex with the goal of pregnancy, initiating a favorite erotic scenario, being playful or spontaneous, sexuality to celebrate a career success or soothe a personal disappointment) facilitate anticipation and desire.**
- 15) **External turn-ons (R or X-rated videos, music, candles, sex toys, visual feedback from mirrors, being sexual outside the bedroom, a weekend away without the kids) facilitate anticipation and desire.**
- 16) **Non-demand pleasuring can be a way to reinforce attachment, a means to share pleasure, or a bridge to sexual desire.**
- 17) **Intimate coercion is not acceptable.** Sexuality is neither a reward nor a punishment. Sexuality is voluntary, mutual, and pleasure-oriented.
- 18) **Realistic expectations are crucial for maintaining a satisfying sexual relationship. It is self-defeating to demand equal desire, arousal, orgasm, and satisfaction each time.** Realistically, 35 to 45 percent of experiences are very good (mutual and synchronous). Twenty percent are very good for one (usually the man) and fine for the partner. Fifteen to 20 percent are okay for one and the other finds it acceptable. Be aware that 5-15 percent of sexual experiences are dissatisfying or dysfunctional. Couples who accept occasional mediocre or dysfunctional experiences without guilt or blaming and reengage when they are open and responsive have a vital, resilient sexual relationship. Satisfied couples use the guideline of Good Enough Sex (GES) to promote positive, realistic sexual expectations.
- 19) **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 become self-conscious and are in danger of falling into a cycle of anticipatory anxiety, tense and unsatisfying intercourse, and avoidance.
- 20) **Healthy sexuality plays a positive, integral role in your relationship with the main function to energize your bond and reinforce feelings of desire and desirability.** Paradoxically, dysfunctional, conflictual or nonexistent sex plays a more powerful negative role than the positive role of good sex.