

Sexual Pleasure: Finding the “Sweet Spot”

Live Well to

Learn Well

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Sexual pleasure is a worthy pursuit. And, just like consent, pleasure is something you should be able to expect in any sexual encounter with another person. There are many pleasurable benefits to sex. It can provide a release of “feel-good” hormones, making it a great stress buster. It can also be a fun way to wake up in the morning, a tender way to connect during the day, or a terrific study break. Experiencing orgasms with sex is one dimension of pleasure, but learning to enjoy closeness, sensation, and connection are important elements as well.

You can use the following information to help find that “sweet spot”—during self-play or time with a partner—and create experiences that are consensual and pleasurable for all involved.

Create space for exploration

Enjoying sex and experiencing sexual pleasure starts with understanding what makes you feel good. This discovery could happen with a partner, but you can also try things out on your own.

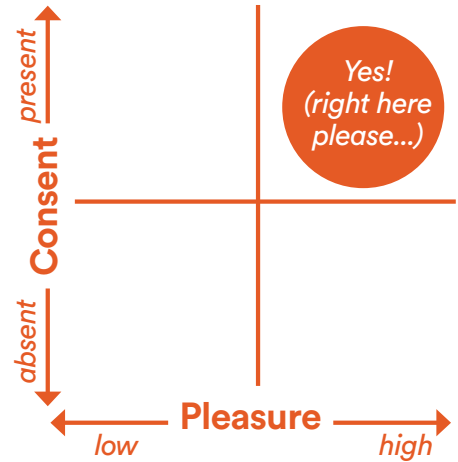
Get to know your mind. What are your turn-ons? Is there anything that turns you off? Do you have any sexual dreams or fantasies? Explore these ideas while you are alone. One of the great things about thinking through these things alone is you have the power to stop immediately or change up what you’re thinking about. See what arouses you.

Get to know your body. Before you have sex with others, learn what works for you through self-exploration and masturbation. Find a space where you aren’t going to get interrupted and explore different areas of your body. If something doesn’t feel good, try something else. Experiment. By learning how to experience pleasure on your own, you’ll be more ready to tell a partner how to make you feel good. Not reaching an orgasm through masturbation? That’s okay; enjoy yourself.

Explore with your partner. In addition to exploring alone, consider exploring with a partner. A great option for exploration with someone else is to utilize foreplay. Spice things up by exploring new erogenous zones together. However, when experimenting with someone else remember that communication and consent are key. Tell them if something isn’t working; then try something else.

Cultivate trust & communication

Whether you are in a committed partnership, or getting to know someone, sexual pleasure can be enhanced with a few key reminders aimed at building trust and communication:



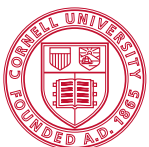
The “sweet spot” occurs in the quadrant where pleasure and consent are high for all involved...

Trust your gut. If something doesn’t feel right, it probably isn’t. Maybe you feel a knot in your stomach or notice your partner’s body language seems closed-off. It’s important to tune into your body whether you are exploring something for the first time or for the 100th. Trust yourself.

Ask for what you like. A partner won’t know your likes and dislikes if you haven’t told them. If you feel uncomfortable asking directly for something you enjoy, consider showing them instead. Guide their hand away from a place that you aren’t comfortable with to a place that feels better. Not sure where to begin with understanding your likes and dislikes? Google Scarleteen’s “Yes, No, Maybe So: A Sexual Inventory Stocklist” and review it alone or with a partner.

You have the freedom to change your mind. If something felt good last week, it doesn’t mean that it has to feel good this week – and vice versa! Communicate your feelings to your partner and be respectful of your partner’s changes in likes and dislikes. Ask them, “how does this feel today?”

Consent is an ongoing conversation whether you are hooking up with someone for the first time or in a committed relationship. Check in when you change activities to see that you’re on the same page. Talk about the things that you are curious about. Establishing consent doesn’t have to be awkward. Comments that indicate your consent like “I like that” and “why don’t we try this instead” can be a sexy addition to any encounter.



Don't assume your partner wants sex just because they seem physically aroused. For example, neither the fact that a penis is erect nor that a vulva is "wet" indicate a desire to be sexual. Our physiological responses are often automatic, and not always in line with our sexual desires and wishes. This is one more reason to check in verbally with a partner.

These conversations can happen wherever, whenever... Don't wait until the last second to talk about sex. In fact, sometimes these conversations are best held outside the bedroom. Talk about your sexual likes and dislikes and ask your partner about theirs. To address any health and safety concerns, talk with your partner about safer sex. Ask when they were last tested for STIs, etc. Talking openly about things like this can promote psychological, as well as physical safety, and allow you to feel more comfortable hooking up with someone.

Amazing bits & pieces

Our bodies are amazing creations—each one unique and wired to give and receive pleasure. You may think you know all there is to know about how your body works, but **DID YOU KNOW...**

Your brain is a sex organ. It controls your sexual response—the way your body responds to arousal, sex, or masturbation. It also controls your five senses, which all contribute to a pleasurable sexual experience.

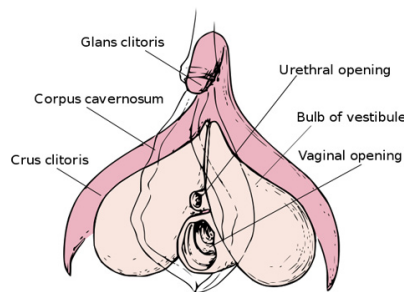
Engage your senses and see what you experience. Try new scents, use extra soft sheets, put on a favorite playlist. The brain is where your sexual fantasies and identities lie. When your brain is open, excited, and eager for touch and sensation, the rest of your body is most likely to respond in a similar fashion.

Sexually-charged "erogenous zones" are located all over your body—not just the genital area or breasts. Get to know yours. Some people feel gently aroused when their cheeks, lips, or temples are stroked. Gliding a hand over the inner thighs while kissing can be highly pleasurable for some and not for others. Try your knees, feet, butt, and arms. Your body is hard-wired to receive pleasure.



Erogenous zones vary from person to person. Where are some of yours?

Don't underestimate the clitoris! The head of the clitoris is approximately the size of a pea and located at the top of the vulva beneath the clitoral hood. But the rest is "wishbone shaped" and extends up to five inches inside the body and down the labia. The thousands of nerve endings that make up the clitoris (more than any other part of the body) exist only for pleasure. Learn what amount of touch feels good to you.



Only the "head" (glans) of the clitoris is visible.

Sex drives vary – work with yours. Sex drive varies between people, time of day, and year. Learn when you and your partner are most likely to be aroused and work with this knowledge rather than against it. Sleepy at night? Try the morning. Feeling good in the shower? Try some self-play. Recognize when your body is in the mood.

Technology & sex

Sex toys—From vibrators, to bondage, to fetish gear, sex toys are called that because they help people expand the playful nature of sex. They can be used for solo sex as well sex with a partner. Explore the wide range of toys available and see what piques your interests

or take a sexy shopping trip with your partner(s).

Pornography—Exposure to and use of pornography is totally normal. Whether you choose to use porn for individual pleasure or with a partner, learn how much and how comfortable you are engaging with porn. While it holds the possibility of heightening arousal and sexual play, remember that porn is staged and uses actors. Just because porn shows couples giving and receiving pleasure in one way, that doesn't mean that's how all people get pleasure from sex. Also keep in mind that just because your body doesn't look like what you're seeing doesn't mean you're not "normal"; everyone's body is unique. Interested in porn? Why not check out ethical porn? Ethical porn means that the performers are given fair compensation and are given choice in the sex they'd like to engage in and with whom. They also given the option to use safer sex supplies. Interested in learning more? Google the "Feminist Porn Awards."

Support & guidance

Having trouble? If things aren't going well with sex (e.g., you are experiencing physical discomfort, psychological distress, or difficulties with erection, orgasm, or intimacy) resources are available at Cornell Health. Start by talking with your Primary Care Provider (PCP). To do this, make an appointment for medical care: call 607-255-5155 or schedule online at myCornellHealth. Your PCP can provide exams, testing, or referrals to other providers as needed, including specialty sex counseling.

Remember, you deserve support. Many people carry a complicated history when it comes to sex. Some of us come from cultures where sex is not openly talked about or have had to learn about sex without guidance. Some have been in abusive relationships or have been sexually assaulted in their past. Others are managing a chronic STI. Regardless of your background with sex, you deserve to feel pleasure if you choose to engage in any form of sexual activity.