

DISSOLVING SEXUAL DIFFERENCES

One of the most common conflicts in relationships is over sex. The more demanding one person becomes, the less the other wants to give. Often, if the sexually inhibited partner switches roles, the other person backs off. When children enter a relationship, the energy one or both partners have for sex can also be dramatically reduced. Gender differences in sexual needs and arousal patterns almost seem to be nature's recipe for disaster. However, these differences can become assets that actually create a more passionate, fulfilling sex life.¹

TO HELP THE WOMAN BE MORE SEXUALLY RECEPTIVE

1. "Foreplay" starts hours before sex. Go on a walk, go out to dinner, take her shopping, help her with domestic chores, and listen to her feelings and thoughts.
2. Go to bed 20 minutes before the woman is at the point of exhaustion. You can turn the TV or computer back on after lovemaking if you're not ready to fall asleep.
3. Do not expect a woman to want sex. She may not be aware of any sexual needs until she is excited through stimulation. Because she does not have to perform, she does not even need to be aroused to enjoy the benefits of sex (good bedtime exercise, a better night's sleep, increased estrogen levels, and possibly a longer life).
4. Do not ask a woman if she wants sex. Help her get in the mood by building a fire, lighting candles, bringing chocolate to bed, talking, cuddling, or massaging. If she doesn't respond, leave her alone!
5. Do not exceed your partner's limits for the amount of sex she can handle. Discuss the days and frequency that are best for her (at other times than during lovemaking).
6. Focus on what you have in your sex life, not on what is missing. Pressuring your partner to do things that make her uncomfortable can kill all interest. It is fine to occasionally ask if she has changed her mind, as long as she has absolute freedom to reject your idea.
7. Masturbation can help even out sex drives. When done while being held by one's partner, it adds intimacy to a relationship. When done in privacy, it may create compulsions and erode relationships.

TO REKINDLE A MAN'S SEXUAL DESIRES

1. Use indirect "mating signals" to reduce performance pressure or feelings of rejection—wear perfume, lingerie, jewelry, get into bed naked, light a candle.
2. Assure your partner that he does not have to perform when you need a sexual release. Ask if he is willing to hold you while you masturbate. He may get turned on by the time you are ready to climax and join in, or he can enjoy your pleasure vicariously.
3. Do not berate a man for being aroused by sexual stimuli in his environment. Encourage him to direct that arousal toward you by making sexual touches when he is turned on by his surroundings.
4. If your partner wants something "distasteful," keep an open mind. Say, "That's too big a stretch for me now, but I'll consider it." Meet him halfway on sexy lingerie and so on.
5. Reassure your partner that you love sex with him and that you will want it later if you are too exhausted for any contact at that time. When possible, ask for a quickie or offer to help your partner masturbate rather than making a total rejection.

¹ Strategies in this handout are adapted from *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* by John Gray (Harper Perennial, 1997).

TO ENHANCE SEXUAL AROUSAL AND SATISFACTION FOR BOTH PARTNERS

1. Take turns! The first few moments of lovemaking can be spent stimulating a man's penis to heighten his sexual energies. He can then focus on pleasuring his partner for the next 20 or more minutes.
2. Use foreplay to give a woman the opportunity to have her orgasm first. Use a teasing approach—start with her least erogenous zone. However, there may be times of the month when a woman is not capable of having an orgasm due to hormone ratios.
3. A man can penetrate when a woman signals she is about to climax or even afterwards. This reduces pressure on a man to maintain his erection without depriving his partner of any pleasure. Although many women enjoy the sensations of penetration, most need other stimulation to have an orgasm.
4. A man can build control by focusing on pleasuring his partner. He may even tell her she doesn't have to do anything. During intercourse, he can focus on stimulating her, lie quietly inside her, or briefly withdraw. If he comes too soon, he can help his partner or hold her while she masturbates.
5. If a man's erection goes away, it will usually come back if he pretends things are fine and focuses on his partner's pleasure. This reduces dependency on his erection. The worst mistake is to focus on getting the man's erection back.
6. A man or woman may increase the intensity of an orgasm by backing off when close to a climax and building up again. Women who are multiorgasmic may find that one big orgasm is more satisfying than several.
7. Both men and women need a balanced diet of quickies and longer sexual delights. Negotiate quickies for cuddles, romantic evenings, or back rubs. Intercourse that regularly lasts longer than 30 minutes can make one or both partners sore and gives some women infections and leg cramps. After the initial endorphin high of courtship has worn off, use hour-long lovemaking sessions sparingly.
8. Faking sexual responses can help a woman focus on her arousal and give her partner nonverbal feedback about what is turning her on. However, a woman should not fake orgasms and can tell her partner when it is not a good time for her to have one (see number 2).
9. Discuss turn-ons when sex is not an option to decrease the chance of feeling criticized during lovemaking. Read sex manuals together and discuss interesting ideas. Focus on turn-ons rather than turn-offs: "I really like it when you . . ."
10. When more variety is desired, develop several different routines. This eventually helps build spontaneity during lovemaking.
11. Do not try to coordinate simultaneous orgasms. This can interfere with enjoyment and prevents you from giving your partner support during his or her orgasm.
12. Do not use sex to reassure yourself that your partner loves you! That can upset delicate patterns of sexual desire and lead to compulsions. Ask for hugs and cuddles instead. However, at times "sexual healing" can help a man overlook petty annoyances, melt his anger, and may be worth the improvement in his mood.
13. Use your sexual longings to arouse your partner by writing what you are feeling, buying a card, or quoting from the *Songs of Songs*. Share your "sex note" hours before any relations so arousal can build in a nonpressured way. Long-distance sexual phone calls can keep romantic energy in the relationship when partners are apart.