

Tune In, Turn On, Bliss Out

Try a more mindful approach to sex and see if it doesn't lead you to transcendence.

BY JILL HAMILTON

DON'T WORRY ABOUT toys, potions, tricks, and acrobatics. The most effective way to have amazing sex may be to simply stay in the moment, concentrating on the sensations you're experiencing, rather than letting your mind wander while your body goes on autopilot. As it turns out, this kind of mindfulness can not only improve your mental and physical health—when brought between the sheets, it can also help increase desire and arousal and get you closer to satisfaction. “Research suggests



that the part of your conscious brain that shuts off right before orgasm is the same part that shuts off when you're meditating, concentrating intensely, or otherwise being mindful,” says Laurie Mintz, PhD, a professor of psychology at the University of Florida and the author of *A Tired Woman's Guide to Passionate Sex*. So when you focus on what's happening in the present, you may very well be putting yourself in an orgasmic state of mind.

Mindfulness can also be an effective intervention for sexual dysfunction due to genital pain, low desire, or inability to reach orgasm, says Lori Brotto, PhD, director of the Sexual Health Laboratory at the University of British Columbia.

And the benefits of mindful sex extend beyond the bedroom. “There is a large and growing body of scientific literature suggesting that mindfulness reliably improves relationship satisfaction,” notes Kyle Stephenson, PhD, an associate professor of psychology at Willamette University.

Yet it can be hard to stay in the heat of the moment when your brain insists on producing mood-killing thoughts like *Did I pay the cable bill?* or *Is there any cake left?* If that's happening to you, take heart; with a bit of intention, you can learn to stay focused and gloriously fulfilled. How to start:

MAKE MINDFULNESS A HABIT

Practice being present in daily activities. For example, when taking a shower, pretend it's your first time and experience it with all your senses: Feel your soapy hand gliding along your skin, inhale the scent of your shampoo, taste the falling water droplets. Try taking a mindful approach to even the most mundane tasks, like brushing your teeth (feel the bristles against your tongue) or washing dishes (splash your hands in the water). “When your mind wanders, bring it back to the sensations,” says Mintz. Keep it up, and you'll be pleasantly surprised by how much easier it becomes to apply this mindset to more carnal pursuits.

BE A LAZY SELF-LOVER

Consider indulging in tantric masturbation—the solo version of tantric sex. “Tantra is about experiencing the moment in a slow and meditative way without any expectations,” says Jennifer Foust, PhD, a certified sex therapist and clinical director at the Center for Growth, a psychotherapy practice in Philadelphia. Lock the door and take to your bed for a languid session of self-love. “Follow the contours of your body and explore the sensations as they occur,” says Foust. No judgment, no criticism, no goals.

GET IN TOUCH

Try this erotic meditation exercise: Sit cross-legged and “tune in to the incredible space between your legs,” says Pamela Madsen, founder of Back to the Body retreats for women, who is certified in somatic sex education, a practice that uses touch to nurture (and sometimes heal) the sensual self. Cup your vulva with your hand and rock back and forth. Think about asking how your vagina is feeling, Madsen suggests. Sound a little out-there? It's really just a take on the traditional mindfulness technique of focusing your attention on a part of your body, breathing into it, and scanning for physical sensations.

REDISCOVER EACH OTHER

Routines may be comforting in their familiarity, but they can nudge couples into boredom. Instead of going through the (same old) motions, act like you're still new to each other. Explore your partner's body, and encourage them to do the same to you. “Partnered mindful touch helps couples reawaken their bodies to experience mutual pleasure,” says Janet Brito, PhD, a sex therapist and supervisor certified by the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists. Don't know where to start? “Pretend your hand is a magic wand of exploration,” says Maisha Aza, a sex and intimacy expert and founder of Black Girl Tantra—and see where it takes you.

FORGET THE O WORD

If you're having fewer orgasms than you'd like, it may be because you're *too* focused on making that happen, which can create extra pressure and distraction. Dissociating sex from orgasm may make it easier for you to relax into the moment as it happens without thinking or rushing ahead. Remind yourself to appreciate sex for the physical and emotional pleasure it brings, and not as a means to an end.

USE YOUR SENSES

If you find yourself drifting away (*I should sign up for autopay...*), try a variation of the “five senses” exercise, often recommended by mindfulness practitioners as a way to help ease anxiety. Train each of your senses on at least one thing about your partner, one at a time—for example, “the way they taste and smell, the texture of their skin, areas of their body that look beautiful to you, sounds that vibrate from them during the act,” says Aza—and then notice how your body feels in response. In addition, be open to easily overlooked sensations, such as the feel of the sheets on your back. Allow yourself to be swept up in the unique delight of the here and now.