

Five things research can teach us about having better sex, according to a sex therapist

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Sex can be wonderful, but it can also be tricky. Science may be the furthest thing from your mind when you're getting intimate with someone. But actually, there's a lot we can learn from science when it

comes to sex.

The science of sex is a broad field of research that encompasses many aspects of human sexuality, from physiology to the psychological and social factors that influence sexual behavior.

Over the years, researchers have been able to shed light on a variety of ways we can enhance sexual experiences in (or outside of) the bedroom. In the spirit of Valentine's Day, here are five key lessons you can take from science if you're looking to improve things between the sheets.

1. Understanding arousal and desire

Arousal and desire play a crucial role in human sexuality. Arousal (or excitement) is a necessary component of sexual activity and can be triggered by a range of stimuli, including physical touch, visual cues, and [psychological factors](#). In the context of sex, desire (or libido) refers to the drive or motivation to engage in [sexual activity](#).

Arousal and desire are complex phenomena and can both be influenced by a variety of factors, including biological, psychological and environmental factors.

The [sexual response cycle](#) devised by William Masters and Virginia Johnson, who were known in the 1960s for their controversial research into the physiology of human sexuality, refers to stages of emotional and [physical changes](#) as a person becomes aroused during sexually stimulating activities (including intercourse and masturbation). Typically, these phases include desire, arousal, orgasm and resolution (return to normal).

Yet, other sexual response models tell us that men and women [experience these phases differently](#). One reason for this is that women

tend to have a more complex response to sexual stimuli, as they are more likely to be influenced by psychological and emotional cues such as communication and relationship dynamics.

Science also tells us that while arousal and desire are interconnected, they [work in different ways](#). For example, if a man displays signs of physical arousal (such as morning erections), this doesn't mean he necessarily feels "horny" or desires sex. Similarly, a woman might not have a desire for sex, yet desire may surface either before or after arousal.

2. Communicating openly and honestly

Another aspect of improving sexual experiences is communication. Research has shown that couples who [communicate openly and regularly](#) about their sexual preferences are more likely to experience greater sexual satisfaction.

To improve communication, try having honest and open conversations with your partner (or partners) about your sexuality. Because sex can be many things for many people, don't be embarrassed to discuss your turn-ons and any concerns or dislikes you might have.

3. Adding variety to your sex life

Research shows that adding thrill and a variety of [stimulation and techniques](#) to your sex life such as different sexual positions, manual stimulation (for example, fingering), masturbation practices and oral stimulation, can enhance your sexual enjoyment. Some other things you might consider trying include:

- role playing

- exploring kink and BDSM practices
- incorporating sex toys
- sensual massage
- using lubricants
- practicing [tantric sex](#)
- masturbating in front of your partner (or partners)
- watching ethical porn
- swinging.

When exploring any of these activities, it's important to obtain [mutual consent](#) and respect each other's boundaries.

4. Mindfulness

[Mindfulness](#), a state of present-moment awareness, has been shown to have a positive impact on sexual experiences. By increasing awareness and attention to sensations in the body, mindfulness can enhance sexual arousal and desire.

There are several ways in which mindfulness can be incorporated into sexual experiences. One approach is to focus on the [present moment](#) and pay attention to sensations in the body during sexual activities. This can help increase sexual arousal and enhance pleasure.

Additionally, taking slow, deep breaths and focusing on the sensation of breathing can help calm the mind and increase sexual desire.

Mindfulness and breathing exercises are likewise useful for managing anxiety around sex.

Creating a calming space for physical intimacy can also help build trust and improve intimate partner bonding.

5. Managing expectations

The idea that sex is predictable, clear-cut and [picture-perfect](#) is unrealistic. Sex is complex and multifaceted.

Yet our [sexual scripts](#) often tell us otherwise. Sexual scripts are best understood as the messages we've learned about sex growing up. Cultural norms and religious beliefs can influence our attitudes toward sexual behavior and pleasure. For example, certain cultures or religions may view sex as a solely procreative act, or limit the expression of sexuality to only heterosexual relationships.

Scripts can be limiting, in that they can define what is considered "normal" (for example, that intercourse will equal an orgasm) or "acceptable." But they can also be empowering and sex positive, providing a framework for exploring and expressing sexuality.

Regardless of our ideas about sex, it's also important to feel comfortable in our own bodies. If you can embrace your body and love it the way it is, this will help when you have sex. Try not to overthink during [sexual experiences](#) and allow your body to do what comes naturally.

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