

## Guidelines for Revitalizing and Maintaining Sexual Desire

1. The keys to sexual desire are positive anticipation and feeling you deserve sexual satisfaction in your intimate relationship.
2. Each person is responsible for his/her desire with the couple functioning as an intimate 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 is the most common sexual dysfunction, affecting one in three couples. Desire problems drain intimacy and positive 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 non-sexual relationship.
5. The initial romantic love/passionate sex relationship phase lasts less than two years, and often less than six months. Desire in an on-going relationship is maintained by developing a comfortable and 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 as consisting of "**Five Gears**". The First Gear is clothes on, affectionate touch, such as holding hands, kissing and/or hugging. The Second Gear is non-genital, sensual touch which can be clothed, semi-clothed, or nude. It can involve non-genital body massage, cuddling on the couch, showering together, holding and caressing and/or touching when going to sleep or upon awakening. The Third Gear is playful touch which intermixes genital and non-genital touching, clothed or unclothed. It can include romantic or erotic dancing, touching in the bath or shower, on the couch or in bed, whole body massage, and/or playing strip poker or Twister. The Fourth Gear is erotic touch (manual, oral, rubbing or vibrator stimulation) which leads to high arousal and orgasm for one or both partners. The Fifth Gear integrates pleasurable and erotic touch which flows into intercourse. Intercourse is a natural continuation of the pleasuring eroticism process, and it is not a pass-fail test.

9. Both partners value affectionate, sensual, playful, erotic and intercourse experiences.
10. Both partners are comfortable initiating touching and intercourse. Both people 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. It is a way to share pleasure, and reinforce and deepen intimacy. Sex is also a tension reducer that can help you deal with the stresses of life and your 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 2-3 times a week. For couples in their fifties, the average is 1-2 times a week.
14. Personal turn-ons can facilitate sexual anticipation and desire. These turns-ons can include fantasies, special celebrations or memories, times when one is feeling cared for and close, anniversaries or birthdays, sex with the goal of pregnancy, initiating a favourite erotic scenario, being playful or spontaneous, or engaging in sexuality to celebrate a career success or soothe a personal disappointment.
15. External turn-ons can also facilitate sexual anticipation and desire. These can include “R” or “X”-rated movies, music, candles, sex toys, visual feedback from mirrors, being sexual outside the bedroom, or a weekend away from the children.
16. Non-demand pleasuring can be a way to reinforce attachment and share pleasure. It can also provide a bridge to sexual desire.
17. Intimate coercion is not acceptable. Sexuality is neither a reward nor a punishment. Sexuality is voluntary and pleasure-oriented.
18. Realistic expectations are crucial for maintaining a satisfying sexual relationship. It is self-defeating and harmful to demand equal desire, arousal, orgasm and satisfaction each time. Realistically, 35-45% of experiences are very good for both partners. About 20% are very good for one partner (usually the man) and fine for the other. About 15-20% are okay for one partner and acceptable for the other. Be aware that 5-15% of sexual experiences are dissatisfying or dysfunctional. Couples who accept occasional mediocre or dysfunctional

experiences without guilt or blame, and try again when they are open and responsive, have a vital and resilient sexual relationship. Satisfied couples use the guideline of Good Enough Sex (GES) to promote positive and 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 occurs less than twice a month, a person can become self-conscious and fall into a cycle of anticipatory anxiety, tense and unsatisfying intercourse, and continued avoidance.
20. Health sexuality plays a positive and integral role in your relationship with the main function to energize your bond and generate feelings of desire and desirability. Paradoxically, conflictual or non-existent sex plays a more powerful negative role in a relationship than the positive role of good sex.

### **Action Steps You Can Take**

If the couple has gone two weeks without any sexual contact, the partner with higher desire takes the initiative to set up a planned or spontaneous sexual date. If that date does not occur, the other partner initiates a sensual or play date during the following week. If that does not occur and they have gone a month without any sexual contact, they schedule a “booster” therapy session.