



# Improve Your Sex Life



Expert advice for married women



# Improve Your Sex Life

Expert advice for married women

Click on an article you'd like to read:

**3 INTRODUCTION**

Sex. There, I Said It.

*By Kelli B. Trujillo*

**5 LEADER'S GUIDE**

Using "Improve Your Sex Life" for a group study

**6 PERFECT BODIES EQUAL PERFECT SEX**

... And other lies we believe

*By Teri Looney*

**11 INCREASE YOUR SEX IQ**

7 things you need to know about sex

*By Debra Taylor and Michael Sytsma*

**19 SEX WITHOUT RESERVATIONS**

How to enjoy each other—completely

*By Douglas Rosenau and Debra Taylor*

**25 CANDID SEX QUESTIONS**

3 expert answers to help you

*By Louis and Melissa McBurney*

**30 WHAT EVERY WOMAN NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT SEXUAL SATISFACTION**

Tips for increasing your arousal and response

*By Joyce J. Penner*

**36 ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

Articles and online resources to help you further



## Introduction

# Sex. There, I Said It.

*By Kelli B. Trujillo*

I remember as a young newlywed attempting to purchase a Christian sex book at a bookstore. I nearly got up the courage to purchase it, until I saw the adolescent teenage boy who was working at the checkout counter. I couldn't handle him seeing what I was buying, so I put the book back and bought myself a blueberry scone instead.

Some Christian women are "out there" about sex—ready, willing, and able to talk openly, candidly, and sometimes even a bit too bawdily about sex. Others are on the other end of the spectrum, modest and private, and sometimes maybe even prudish. As the years have gone on for me, I'd say that I now land somewhere in the middle (though maybe leaning still toward the "private" side of the spectrum). I'm more open with discussions about sexuality and its importance in our lives than I was as a newlywed, but I also feel slightly uncomfortable with making private matters public.

## Improve Your Sex Life

Sex. There, I Said It.

No matter where you land on this spectrum—if you're a person who happily gushes about your hot night with your husband or if even whispering the word sex makes you blush—you've got sexual needs. You've got sexual questions. And you've faced (or may currently be facing) sexual difficulties.

Sex is a central aspect of our lives as married women. This is true if we're having sex frequently or if it's few and far between—it's important to how God made us and is a part of his design. God wants your sex life to be healthy and satisfying! And there are several things you can do to improve and enliven your sexual connection with your husband.

This Today's Christian Woman download provides you with frank, candid discussion about sexual issues and about how you can have a vibrant, fulfilling sex life with your husband. In these pages you'll find detailed insights about the emotional and psychological aspects of sex as well as how-to tips from Christian sex therapists. You'll also find honest answers to some difficult sex questions— questions you may have, but have been afraid to ask.

So grab yourself some chocolate to nibble on, find a comfy spot, and sit back to relax, read, and reflect on God's gift of sex to you and your husband. God desires the best for you!

Grace,

*Kelli B. Trujillo*

Managing Editor, TODAY'S CHRISTIAN WOMAN downloads



## Leader's Guide

# Using "Improve Your Sex Life" for a group study

"Improve Your Sex Life" can be used for individual or group study. If you intend to lead a group study, some simple suggestions follow.

1. Make enough copies for everyone in the group to have her own guide.
2. Depending on the time you have dedicated to the study, you might consider distributing the guides before your group meets so everyone has a chance to read the material. Some articles are quite long and could take a while to get through.
3. Alternately, you might consider reading the articles together as a group—out loud—and plan on meeting multiple times.\*
4. Make sure your group agrees to complete confidentiality. This is essential to getting women to open up.
5. When working through the Reflect questions, be willing to make yourself vulnerable. It's important for women to know that others share their experiences. Make honesty and openness a priority in your group.
6. End the session in prayer.

*\* Many of the Reflect questions in this download are very personal in nature and may not be appropriate for group discussion. If you are using this download for a group study, consider identifying just 1 or 2 Reflect questions from each article to discuss; encourage women to think about the remaining questions on their own at home. If you'd like, challenge women to use the questions to prompt personal journaling.*



# Perfect Bodies Equal Perfect Sex

... And other lies we believe

By Teri Looney

I remember feeling queasy the first time I heard the idea: if your love life seems stale, send the kids to a neighbor's house, prepare a candlelight dinner, and greet your man at the front door swathed only in Saran Wrap. First of all, Saran Wrap isn't cheap and I'm a size 12. Second, do I really want to send my husband the subliminal message that I'm just "leftovers"? And third, what happens if I get too close to those candles?

After careful thought I decided to keep the Saran Wrap in the kitchen where it belongs. Instead, in our intimate moments together, I choose to think of myself as a beautifully wrapped gift from God to my husband. This choice isn't always an easy one. Today's culture lies to us about God's gift of sexuality. See if any of these common misconceptions are robbing you and your spouse of the joy God intends for you to experience at the most intimate level.

## Improve Your Sex Life

Perfect Bodies Equal Perfect Sex . . . And other lies we believe

**Lie #1: Sex is just doing what comes naturally.**

**Truth: *It takes work to maintain a satisfying sexual relationship.***

Get educated about your body and your mate's body. Your library or local Christian bookstore has excellent materials on the way our bodies work. Check out **A Celebration of Sex** by Douglas Rosenau or **When Two Become One** by Christopher and Rachel McCluskey. Explore what feels good to you.

Push through your discomfort and ask questions about his anatomy—where he likes to be touched, what turns him on, and so on. Then share with him some of your turn-ons or in what ways you two could make your sex life even better.

One wise woman I know takes the time to identify the several days of each month when her desire is likely to be the highest, and she makes sure she and her husband have the opportunity for intimacy. (For most women this would be days 12-16 of their cycle, counting from the first day of the menstrual flow.) It's a win/win situation.

**Lie #2: Perfect bodies equal perfect sex.**

**Truth: *A beautiful body doesn't guarantee a satisfying relationship.***

A recent tabloid headline caught my eye at the grocery store. It asked, "Why do these men cheat on Hollywood's most beautiful women?" Taking care of our physical bodies honors God; *worshipping* our physical bodies does not. When we obsess about our appearance and compare ourselves to some ideal, we're flirting with disaster. While a healthy diet and appropriate exercise keep us functioning at our best, until we get our glorified bodies in heaven, we must deal with imperfection. Don't let the impossible standards of the culture cheat you and your husband. Give yourself freedom to enjoy the gift with the body God has given you.

**Lie #3: Emotional intimacy is more godly than physical intimacy.**

**Truth: *Both are equally important.***

In general, men experience a greater need for physical intimacy and women require more emotional closeness. But in a growing number of marriages, it's actually the opposite, where the woman feels the greater need sexually.

## Improve Your Sex Life

Perfect Bodies Equal Perfect Sex . . . And other lies we believe

God intends for the differences to draw us together, not separate us. "So God created human beings in his own image. In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27).

It takes both masculine and feminine qualities to mirror God's character. Think of magnets. The opposite poles attract while the similar poles repel. Both components are equally important to a healthy marriage. So the next time you become tempted to judge your spouse harshly because he or she isn't "like you" sexually or emotionally, remember that God created your spouse different on purpose—for you both to grow and be stretched . . . emotionally, spiritually, and physically.

**Lie #4: Nobody else has this problem.**

**Truth: *It's a rare couple who does not deal with challenges in the bedroom.***

Some problems prove temporary and resolve with time, prayer, and patience. For issues such as abuse, unfaithfulness, pornography, and other distortions of sexuality, the help of a therapist can be invaluable. On a physical level, the body is God's most complex creation. Sometimes things don't work as they should. These breakdowns occur more frequently as we age. Don't hesitate to bring up sexual issues with your physician. Ask for a referral to a specialist if your doctor doesn't feel equipped to help you. But the important thing to remember is you're not alone. Others deal with these same issues.

**Lie #5: A Christian mate can never say "no."**

**Truth: *"Yes" means nothing if there isn't the option of "no."***

It's our commitment to love that challenges us to say "yes" as often as we can. Also, I've found that I can honor my spouse even in the way I say "no." "Honey, I'm really tired tonight. How about if we set the alarm 30 minutes early?" Or, "This is a bad time of the month for me, but I know I'll feel better in a couple days. How about a date for Saturday?" Just be sure that the delayed "yes" ends up being a "yes." For many husbands, sex provides the most satisfying way to offer and receive love. When I say "yes" to my spouse, I'm accepting his love for me and affirming mine for him.

Certainly there are times when "yes" is a choice to put my mate's needs before mine. But it is a choice and one that puts me squarely in the middle of God's grace and provision.

## Improve Your Sex Life

Perfect Bodies Equal Perfect Sex . . . And other lies we believe

**Lie # 6: Godly sex means the “missionary position.”**

**Truth: *The only missionary position I can find in my Bible is on a map that traces the routes the apostle Paul traveled in his journeys.***

Godly sex is a celebration. Sometimes it's a gentle assertion of mutual love. Sometimes it's an explosion of intense passion. Always the law of love applies, and this law rules out any behavior that inflicts pain, injures the body, or uses fear or humiliation to achieve satisfaction. But within the boundaries of love there's freedom for creativity between a husband and wife. For some good tips, check out that book called the Song of Solomon. It's right there in your Bible.

**Lie #7: Because of my past I don't deserve to enjoy sex.**

**Truth: *Each of us has made bad choices and each of us has suffered because of the bad choices of others. But this doesn't mean we can't enjoy sex.***

Grace and forgiveness is Jesus' amazing bequest to us, and we honor him each time we choose to receive the grace he offers. When we practice accepting grace, we can then give it freely. Remember the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her hair (**Luke 7:36–38**)? She was acutely aware of the great gift of forgiveness she'd received, and she expressed her gratitude in loving actions. Because of God's forgiveness and mercy, we can refuse to allow the past to rob us of the present. The intimate joy a husband and wife experience can be even sweeter when we actively practice giving and receiving forgiveness.

Take just a minute to think of the most beautifully wrapped gift you have ever received. Remember the way your eyes widened and your breath caught as you held the present in your hands. Remember how carefully you turned it to view it from all sides. Perhaps you gave it a gentle shake before you began slipping off the ribbon and folding back the heavy paper. Remember that feeling of knowing this gift had been selected by someone who knew you intimately. You are that gift from God to your spouse.

**Teri Looney**, speaker and freelance writer, lives in Texas. This article was first published in the Fall 2006 issue of **MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP**.

## Improve Your Sex Life

Perfect Bodies Equal Perfect Sex . . . And other lies we believe

### Reflect

- *In the context of real life (not an idealized, alternate reality!), how would you describe what you consider to be a healthy sex life for a Christian couple? What practices, attitudes, words, and feelings do you think best reflect what God desires for a Christian couple in your stage of marriage?*
- *Sexual expression in marriage often includes both joys and challenges; some of these challenges are physical while others are related to the way we think about sex and how we view ourselves. Lies and distorted ideas can inflict serious damage! Which of the lies Teri has identified do you most struggle with? Which other lies about sex from our culture or from your past may be inflicting damage on your sex life with your husband?*
- *Teri makes the point that the different ways men and women experience intimacy (emotional and physical) is God-intended. What would you say are the main areas of difference between you and your husband in regard to your need for closeness, how you experience a sense of intimacy, and how you feel about your sex life?*



# Increase Your Sex IQ

7 things you need to know about sex

By Debra Taylor and Michael Sytsma

**S**ex seem like it's the same old thing? Does it feel frustrating at times? What you don't know about sex can hurt you and your spouse! In our more than 35 years (combined) counseling couples, researching sexuality, and training other Christian therapists, we've discovered human sexuality continues to develop and reveal new information. Here are seven "biggies" about sex that most couples don't know.

## **I. Initiating sex isn't the only way to express sexual desire.**

Although 80 percent of couples report that the husband wants sex more often than his wife, this may be a skewed number—partly because of the way we define sexual desire. Most of us typically think of sexual desire as a hunger for sex—often with sexual thoughts or fantasies—that prompts us to initiate sex.

It turns out, however, that most women experience a receptive type of sexual desire. Twenty years of research confirms that for many women desire is "triggered" by thoughts and emotions arising during sexual excitement, not before. So when a husband becomes frustrated because he wants his wife to pursue him sexually and he believes that she has no interest in sex because she doesn't do that, he's actually not giving her enough credit! Most women will respond positively to sexual advances—they just don't initiate them because that's not the way they were designed.

Since our culture defines sexual desire as that initiating/ seeking behavior, we don't identify a women's receptivity as desire. But men and women (usually) respond to different types of sexual stimuli and approach differently their sexuality.

This is a key area of misunderstanding between husbands and wives. Many women have commented to us, "I enjoy sex once we're 10 to 15 minutes into foreplay, and I think, *Wow! We should do this more often!* But during the week I hardly ever think about it. I wish I felt more sexual than I do, because I enjoy the closeness it brings."

Most of us assume our partner should act like we do. By recognizing that most men are proactive with sex and most women are reactive, and then by accepting and respecting those differences, we can allow a woman's type of sexual desire to "count."

## **2. Breastfeeding has a direct link to sexual frequency.**

Lowered sex drive is extremely common after childbirth, and even throughout the first year, particularly in breastfeeding women. Many couples don't realize the impact childbirth and breastfeeding can have on their sex life. Prolactin, the hormone that enables women to make breast milk, also lowers sexual drive—though scientists still can't tell us why. Breastfeeding women frequently feel tired, overwhelmed, and—in their own words—"like a cow" during the early months of breastfeeding. Yet their husband's sex drive hasn't lessened.

Combine this with what's going on in the husband at this point. For many husbands, their wife's attention is now shifted from him to the baby. Her decreased desire to touch, cuddle, or have sex may prompt increased

pressure from him, which is typically counter-productive. The result is an increasing gap between what he wants and what she wants.

Many couples, whether breastfeeding or bottle-feeding, aren't prepared for the multiple changes each baby, especially the first, adds to their relationship. They believe they'll zip through those first four to six weeks and then—poof!—resume their sexual relationship without a hitch. These unrealistic expectations can lead to a great deal of disappointment, frustration, and conflict.

Libido doesn't usually "jump back" to pre-pregnancy levels until several months after a mom quits breastfeeding—sometimes as long as one year after stopping. If couples realize this is common, they can better talk through the timing of stopping, the pros and cons of breastfeeding and bottle feeding, and the adjustments required to adapt as a couple through this time.

### **3. Most women need clitoral stimulation to reach orgasm.**

More than 60 percent of women must have direct clitoral stimulation in order to climax. In fact, believing a woman should achieve orgasm through intercourse alone is like expecting a man to reach orgasm by only stroking his testicles. Don't ignore the facts of anatomy. A woman's clitoris is similar to the head (glans) of the man's penis. Often the clitoris isn't stimulated by intercourse. If the head of the penis wasn't involved in intercourse, he wouldn't come very quickly to orgasm, either!

That doesn't mean that a guy reaching immediately for his wife's clitoris to "rev her up" is a good idea. Women come in all shapes and sizes—physically, emotionally, and particularly, sexually—so the only safe way to approach her clitoris is to find out what she wants and likes. A rare woman might be okay with "starting" quickly for her clitoris; most will be offended or turned off.

Like the penis, the clitoris engorges with blood during arousal. Touching before she's aroused can be unpleasant, or even painful.

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Increase Your Sex IQ

Women differ greatly in how they enjoy having their clitoris stimulated, and the types of stimulation can vary during the different stages of lovemaking. It's helpful (and can be fun) for a wife to show her husband how she wants to be stroked by placing her hand over his and actually putting pressure on his fingers to demonstrate where she likes to be touched, how lightly or firmly, and how slowly or quickly she likes the movements to be.

#### **4. There's a fine line between turn-ons and turn-offs. The best sex is when a mate knows the difference.**

We call these "brakes and accelerators." Your sexuality is like driving a car. You can't go real far, real fast, or without damage if you're driving with your foot on the brake. Sexual brakes are those things that hinder your arousal or enjoyment of sex. Some common examples are making love when you're exhausted, feeling criticized by your partner, or trying to be sexually intimate when your in-laws are staying in the bedroom next door.

Sexual accelerators are those things that lead to greater interest and arousal. Some might be feeling rested and relaxed, compliments and affirmations about each other's character and/or body, or daydreaming about positive sexual experiences with your spouse.

Some of the biggest problems come when one spouse thinks he's accelerating, while his mate is feeling the brakes. An example would be "risky" sexual behaviors—having sex in the back seat of a car when you could be "caught," for instance. Other examples would be engaging in a sexual act that makes your partner feel inhibited and uncomfortable.

#### **5. Every couple will face a sexual problem at some point during their marriage.**

In fact, some estimates say 80 percent of couples will experience a sexual problem significant enough that they would benefit from sex therapy. Depression, grief, stress, medications, illness, exhaustion, pregnancy and childbirth, parenting, spiritual issues, trauma, hormones, diet, lack of exercise (or overdoing strenuous exercise), injury—so many things affect our sexuality! Add to that the reality that all marriages will experience conflict.

Since sexual intimacy is one of the first arenas marital conflict harms, it's safe to say all couples will have to problem-solve their sex life at some point.

Sexual problems or "trials"—whether large or small—can be resolved. Although they may not be resolved the way you want them to be, they don't need to have an ongoing cost to your health and marriage. One of the most common results of resolved sexual problems is an improved marriage. While some sexual problems may seem entrenched, don't give up.

## **6. Genitals are not the only—or even the most important—organ responsible for sexual pleasure and orgasm.**

God designed our bodies to be wonderfully responsive to sexual pleasure. There are thousands of specialized nerve endings in the penis and clitoris. Females have several large nerve pathways from their genitals, meaning even more variety, and possibly intensity, in their genital pleasuring. But while God designed our genitals to feel good, he didn't stop there.

The second pathway responsible for sexual pleasure is within the brain. Most people can become aroused when fantasizing or thinking sexual thoughts. While the majority need some touch, it's possible for some people to experience an orgasm just from intense sexual fantasy. Many experts have said that for great sex, the organ between our ears is more important than the organ between our legs. The meaning we give to sex, the attitude we have toward our spouse, the feelings we have about our marriage, all contribute or hinder good feelings and experiences with sex.

Here's an example: Susan has been thinking about her husband, Jim, throughout her busy day. She mulls over his good qualities—his kindness to the kids, offering to stop by the store to pick up things she forgot, filling in for her this past Sunday in an obligation at church. She realizes they've both been busy and it's been longer than usual since they last made love. She begins to think how she could facilitate them being together tonight. What will happen if Jim comes home tonight, after a particularly disappointing day at work, and snaps at her for some minor, stupid thing, then storms off to the garage? Probably not sex.

Or she could overlook his bad mood, override her own irritation, continue to think about his many positive qualities, how closeness is created when they

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Increase Your Sex IQ

share sexually, and still suggest they make love this evening. Her attitude can directly affect their relationship—both outside and inside the bedroom. Why? Because the most important sex organ is the brain.

The reverse of this is also true. If he just focuses on the first pathway (by groping her breasts) and ignores the second pathway (attending to her heart and emotions) she may be working with less than half the sexual stimulation she needs.

But God didn't even stop there! He designed all of our skin to be erotic. Individuals who have nerve damage that cuts off genital sensation can sometimes still experience orgasm from touch to new erotic zones on their skin.

Sexual pleasure in marriage is so important to God, he created multiple pathways to ensure it can happen—from how we think about sex, our spouse, and our relationship, to how we touch each other beyond our genitals. Truly great sexual lovers take time to engage all three of these pathways.

### **7. Sex is a gift, not a right.**

God gave sex as a great gift to married couples. He designed it to teach us about him and his relationship with us. The metaphor of sexual sharing is a picture of presenting ourselves completely and giving all of who we are to another; it is also a picture of receiving someone completely into ourselves.

There are clear physical and relational benefits to consistent sex. Greater cardiac health, increased pain management, menstrual regularity, lower depression, lower anxiety, increased marital satisfaction, and greater sense of well-being are all associated with sexual activity, sexual satisfaction, and orgasm. God encourages married couples to drink deeply and enjoy sexual pleasure with each other. But those spiritual and scientific reasons are not to be used as arguments or weapons against our spouse. Our sexuality is still a gift that we are regularly to give to, and receive from, each other.

Any time a spouse takes the position that sex is a right, something at the heart of sex begins to wither. Perhaps because sex is to be life-giving, life-uniting, a decision, a desire, a gift, a picture, a lesson, a trust-walk—when

instead we demand, pout, withhold, withdraw, fume, scream, berate, or begrudgingly surrender—it is the antithesis of what God created it to be. And something between spouses dies.

A couple cannot have a great sex life if the husband demands sex. Nor can it be great if a wife believes she has to have sex with her husband out of obligation. A great sex life grows only when both discipline themselves to give to each other. God's greatest blessings are offered and received freely. When you freely give yourself to your spouse, and freely receive your spouse into yourself, you nurture your marriage as God celebrates and affirms: "Oh, lover and beloved, eat and drink! Yes, drink deeply of your love!" (Song of Solomon 5:1).

**Debra Taylor, MFT**, is co-author of **Secrets of Eve** (Thomas Nelson). **Michael Sytsma, Ph.D.**, is an ordained minister and founder of **Building Intimate Marriages**. Both are certified Christian sex therapists and co-founders of **Sexual Wholeness, Inc.** This article, originally titled "7 Things You Need to Know About Sex," was published in the Summer 2007 issue of **MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP**.

## Reflect

- *"Most of us assume our partner should act like we do," write the authors of this article. In your own sex life, when have you made this assumption? When have you felt frustrated that your husband doesn't "get" you—what turns you on, the pace you'd want for your sexual encounters, and so on? How could maintaining a higher awareness and acceptance of your differences enrich your sex life?*
- *Debra and Michael write about sexual brakes and accelerators. What are some brakes for you that came immediately to mind as you read? What are some accelerators? Seek to identify 1 to 3 specific accelerators that you could share with your husband in an honest and positive conversation.*

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Increase Your Sex IQ

○ *The article provides a hypothetical example of Susan and Jim. Susan has put effort into getting mentally ready for sex, but Jim has come home in a bad mood. At this point, Susan can respond in hurt and frustration (which would be quite natural)—but she also has the power to intentionally choose a different response. In fact, deciding to go forward and initiate sex would most likely have a significant impact on her relationship as her husband moves from discouragement and anger over his bad day to a feeling of being treasured, wanted, and appreciated. When do you face similar situations? How can your choices about sexual expression yield positive power in your relationship? What difference could a greater commitment to sexual expression make in your emotional and spiritual closeness?*



# Sex Without Reservations

How to enjoy each other—Completely

By Douglas Rosenau and Debra Taylor

**W**hat a sinking feeling when "buts" enter positive conversations.

"Thanks for cleaning the bathroom, but . . ."

"Great job with the kids, Hon, but . . ."

As Christian sex therapists, we hear a lot of these "buts" attached to comments about sex. Couples usually acknowledge that sex is a gift from God, yet they often add "buts" to their affirmation. Here are some of the most common reservations we hear, and ways we help couples make things better.

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Sex Without Reservations

#### Time and energy

*"When we make love, we both wonder why we don't do this more often, but our frequency averages about once a month. We don't seem to have the time or energy."*

Inertia can destroy great lovemaking. Often, a sex life in motion stays in motion and gathers positive momentum; a sex life at rest stays stuck and falls from the forefront. Couples often want sex to happen "spontaneously," but they're too busy! Children, careers, church involvement, civic responsibilities, hobbies, and schooling all foil frequency and douse passion.

In a study of more than 2,000 Christian women, the number one sexual problem was not lack of desire, but fatigue. Most wives don't respond positively to the suggestion of lovemaking at 10:30 at night after a tiring day! Husbands, also weary from many demands, don't think about sex until bedtime.

While men are usually ready more quickly and more frequently, most women have a more receptive or responsive desire. They won't think of sex as often as a man, but if the thought or activity is initiated, they can enter in with enjoyment. If these differences in desire, along with the dampening effects of inertia and fatigue, are not understood, husbands and wives can feel frustrated, pressured, hurt, and bitter.

#### **Solutions:**

List your optimal times for lovemaking and plan definite times for connection. Create spontaneity and variety within these time parameters.

List your most common sexual saboteurs. How will you counter them? Need more energy? A strategic nap? A lock on the bedroom door? An enforced bedtime for the children? (Or for you?)

If you are the partner with a lower desire, become more intentional. Many women have found help by writing "TS" ("Think Sex") on their calendar.

#### Unfulfilled expectations

*"Sex is supposed to be great, but I could go the rest of my life and not miss lovemaking. I don't understand all the hype."*

Lack of enjoyment of sexual intimacy stems from many sources. We remember the newlywed who said, "I went on my honeymoon expecting sex to be like a racecar, but I came home with a camel."

Unrealistic expectations wreak havoc on real, everyday sex. A man or a woman may not understand their own bodies and arousal, or their partner's. Many women are shocked and disappointed when an orgasm doesn't "just happen."

Sometimes sex has been associated with the thrill of the chase: attracting a mate, but not with truly making love. Long-term love with deep emotional connection remains a foreign concept. Past experiences, such as sexual abuse, can also prevent a spouse's arousal or trust of another with sexual responsiveness. Being passionately sexual can somehow seem wrong or ungodly.

#### **Solutions:**

Examine what you believe and how you feel about sex—your own sexuality, your spouse's sexuality, and your sexual sharing with each other. Build on ways you already experience intimacy. Explore together how to deepen your emotional, spiritual, and sexual connection as a couple.

Grow in understanding your body, its sexual responses, and (if you aren't already) becoming orgasmic. (For more help in this area, check out chapter 17 in **A Celebration of Sex** by Doug Rosenau). Wives, talk to other trustworthy women, and husbands, talk to other trustworthy men, who enjoy sex and can mentor you.

**Lack of expertise**

*"I want to enjoy lovemaking, but I'm not a proficient lover. It's difficult to get excited about something that makes me feel inadequate."*

Often lack of knowledge about lovemaking is at the root of this sense of incompetence. A husband may suffer from one of the common male malfunctions, premature ejaculation or erection difficulties, or perhaps simply from his wife's lack of enthusiasm.

Women also may feel inadequate. One recalled how her sexuality had been squelched on her honeymoon by a random and innocent comment from her husband: "I thought you were supposed to move more." She felt criticized and inept.

Another woman told us how she carefully prepared herself on her honeymoon night, floated out of the bathroom in her beautiful lingerie . . . and was greeted by her husband's snores. After a wedding day filled with hundreds of people, dinner, and a long drive to the hotel, he had succumbed to sheer exhaustion. She carried that devastation in her soul for a decade before sharing it with him and resolving it.

Even a lack of understanding of aging can create fear and shut down a potentially great love life. Even though our bodies age and physical response changes, the potential for a fun love life exists into our eighties and nineties.

**Solutions:**

Read a manual to learn about lovemaking, sexual responses, aging, and how to deal with sexual malfunctions. (Try **A Celebration of Sex After 50** by Doug Rosenau and **Secrets of Eve** by Debra Taylor).

Take time to discuss sexual wounds or fears you may have encountered or created during your marriage.

Gently "coach" each other about touches, strokes, positions, or techniques that are pleasurable. Describe to each other what an ideal lovemaking session would be like for you. Accept each other's differences!

### Shame and discomfort

*"Everything I see in the movies makes sex seem like the ultimate pleasure, but for me it's painful."*

More common in women than men, physical pain can occur in the genital area, especially the vagina. Never ignore sexual pain. Pain can be the result of bacterial infections, scar tissue from childbirth, perimenopause or menopausal thinning of the vaginal tissue, vaginismus (an involuntary spasm of the muscles surrounding the entrance to the vagina), lack of lubrication, and many other causes.

And sex can be painful for more than physical reasons. I (Doug) remember co-teaching a class with Debra and saying, "Most women suffer from body image problems." Debra stopped me in the middle of the lecture and stated strongly, "Doug, *all* women suffer from body image problems." This makes being vulnerably "naked and unashamed" (Genesis 2:25)

very difficult. Body image issues may be internal (from a woman's own negative self-talk), or external (from growing up with parents or siblings who criticized her body, or—far worse—from her husband's comments or criticism). Couples can't pair discomfort with their bodies and lovemaking and expect a pleasurable experience.

Read more about dealing with physical pain during sex in "[When Sex Hurts](#)" on [TodaysChristianWoman.com](#).

### **Solutions:**

Consult a physician who specializes in pelvic pain. Solve, as far as possible, any pain problems.

Practice accepting and appreciating your body. Concentrate on the positives.

Get sex therapy. Vaginismus, poor body image, and erectile difficulties need professional help.

Don't let "buts" keep you from giving and receiving what God has provided you in your spouse and in your marriage.

**Douglas Rosenau and Debra Taylor** are sex therapists with *Sexual Wholeness, Inc.* Visit them at <http://www.sexualwholeness.com/>. This article was first published in the Winter 2005 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.

## Reflect

- *What "buts" are getting in the way of you and your husband enjoying a more satisfying sex life?*
- *Douglas Rosenau and Debra Taylor begin with an honest observation of a common "but"—fatigue and busyness can significantly inhibit our sex lives. How have you struggled in this area? Which of their solutions might you want to try? What other changes in your mindset or routine could help you overcome this "but"?*
- *Which of the other sexual "buts" highlighted in this article have you dealt with? Which of Douglas and Debra's suggested solutions seem most helpful to you?*



# Candid Sex Questions

3 expert answers to help you navigate  
bedroom challenges

By Louis and Melissa McBurney

## Getting in the mood

**Q.** *My husband tells me he often thinks about sex during the day, but I never do. I like being close to my husband, and I almost never turn him down when he initiates sex. But truthfully, I'm never in the mood. Should I just accept the way I am, or is there something I can do to become "sexier"?*

**A. Louis:** There's more to being sexy than erotic daydreams. For a woman to accept and enjoy her own sexual feelings in response to her husband's advances is a wonderful expression of sexuality. Developing a level of trust and safety in the context of sexual play is another. That's expressed in being naked and unashamed, wanting to give your body to your husband. Even the simple act of touching your husband affectionately is a sexy behavior.

However, if you don't enjoy sex or are not usually orgasmic, your satisfaction level may increase by adding some sexual thoughts to your day. Thinking about your most romantic and sexually exciting experience just before your husband comes home can increase your level of responsiveness. Most men want to feel needed sexually. Although you may never need your husband sexually as much as he needs you, your occasional initiation of sex can be rewarding in deepening your oneness. Do it as an act of the will, motivated by your desire to give love.

**Melissa:** It's often helpful to identify the ideas and beliefs that control your life. Think back on the sexual attitudes and ideas you developed as you were growing up. What did you hear about sex from the older women in your family? What input did you receive from friends (or enemies)? And how do those ideas affect your marriage today?

There may be some assumptions that are blocking your sexiness. If some of your attitudes need to be altered, now's the time to do it. Perhaps you can get a trusted friend or counselor to help you with the process.

*This Q & A was published in the Fall 1999 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.*

## Holding out for perfection

**Q.** *My wife only feels free to have sex with me if our relationship is "perfect"—or "almost perfect"—by her standards. I know that she needs romance and attention, but that's not enough for her. Any minor disagreement or stress becomes an excuse. We end up having very little sex. Can't a case be made that being physically intimate would improve our feelings of closeness?*

**A. Louis:** Insisting on perfection as a prerequisite for anything will practically assure that it won't occur. So here are two questions for you. First, does your wife have some underlying resistance to sexual closeness that isn't being addressed? Second, is she a perfectionist in all the demands of her life?

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Candid Sex Questions

Either of these possibilities can create huge barriers to becoming sexually intimate. The most common issues we see under the first category are unresolved anger or hurt, fearfulness about sexual vulnerability, and a problem about power or control in the relationship.

Perfectionism is nearly always accompanied by general unhappiness and tension. Individuals who hold impossible perfectionistic standards are basically insecure about their own worth. They can't relax unless everything is perfect. No wonder tremendous pressure interferes with every aspect of life. Enjoying sex just becomes too complicated.

Together, talk about these possibilities. See if you can discover factors—other than your own behavior—that might be turning her off sexually.

**Melissa:** You asked, "Can't physical intimacy improve our feelings of closeness?" For most men, that's true: physical intimacy does improve your feelings of closeness. But it isn't true for all women. Men tend to feel more open, relationally, to their wives after sex. Women tend to feel more sexually open when there is relationship intimacy. See if the ways you're showing "attention and romance" are the ways that are most meaningful to your wife. Being emotionally vulnerable yourself might make a huge difference to her. Since men and women come at intimacy from different directions, you might be wise to take a look at how she sees the problem.

Louis mentioned the issue of power or control in your relationship. Ask your wife if she feels "controlled" by you. If she does, she may be withholding sexual intimacy because it's the only area of your relationship where she can feel that she is in charge. Also check out her definition of "minor disagreements" or "stress." You may have two different ideas about what that covers. The only way to find out is to ask.

*This Q & A was published in the Winter 1999 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.*

## Is oral sex biblical?

**Q.** *Is oral sex wrong between married partners? I've talked to a couple of Christian friends about this, and the consensus is that men are generally for it, while women are generally against it. So who's right? Is there a biblical answer?*

**A. Louis:** Your observation is correct. When couples don't agree on oral sex, the men tend to be the ones who are for it. But in our counseling experience, we find about as many couples who say they practice some type of oral sex as those who don't. Generally the problem is not so much with cunnilingus (the husband stimulating his wife with genital kisses) but with fellatio (the wife stimulating her husband's penis by mouth).

The wife's resistance may be explained by a variety of causes. Rarely is it related to childhood sexual abuse where she was forced into fellatio. Sometimes a wife is responding negatively to insistent demands by her husband, which feel threatening to her. Also, there is often a revulsion to the idea of oral sex because of uncleanness and strong genital odors.

Medically, the practice is generally safe unless there are infectious genital lesions (e.g. herpes, condyloma, chancres, etc.). These call for medical treatment. However, the anal area is not sterile and should be avoided in sexual play.

Biblically, there is no clear directive. Some verses in Song of Solomon seem to suggest oral sex, and **Hebrews 13:4** might imply that any mutually agreeable behavior between husband and wife is sanctioned. The Levitical laws that carry the most explicit sexual directives and prohibitions do not mention oral sex.

**Melissa:** Sexual intimacy is always best when it is mutually satisfying. If oral sex causes dissension, then it is destructive—especially if you're not talking openly about your disagreement. Trying to understand each other's perspective could help a lot. Find some time to talk when your emotions are not so high from lovemaking. Be as open and frank as possible. You might find that you can work out a compromise.

*This Q & A was published in the Summer 1997 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP. Real Sex columnists **Melissa and Louis McBurney, M.D.**, were marriage therapists and co-founders of Marble Retreat in Marble, Colorado, where they counseled clergy couples. Louis McBurney passed away January 20, 2009.*

## Reflect

- *The McBurneys advise wives to try to add sexual thoughts to their day and note that husbands desire to feel sexually needed. How could this advice improve your sex life? What might it look like for you to intentionally rev up your mind to be more receptive and excited about sex with your husband?*
- *One husband asked the McBurneys for help because his wife only participated sexually when she felt their relationship was perfect. Have you ever fallen into a similar attitude toward sex? What can be harmful about withholding sex? How might God be calling you, in general, to have more grace for your husband and your relationship?*
- *The McBurneys counsel couples to speak openly with each other about their feelings, needs, and concerns related to their sexual relationship. As you've read this resource so far, what do you feel you may need to talk with your husband about? What factors could help a conversation like that be successful? How can you also be a good listener to your husband if he speaks about his sexual needs, frustrations, or concerns?*



# What Every Woman Needs to Know about Sexual Satisfaction

Tips for increasing your arousal and response

*By Joyce J. Penner*

**S**o you've never had an orgasm. Or you're not sure if you've been orgasmic. Or you haven't been able to have an orgasm in some way that you wish you could. Or you used to be orgasmic but now you aren't. What can you do? What can your husband do?

An orgasm is a reflex response that gets triggered when there is enough build-up of sexual tension from effective stimulation and freedom to go after it without inhibition or fear of being out of control. We cannot "will" an orgasm, but we can encourage it or resist it.

## Improve Your Sex Life

### What Every Woman Needs to Know about Sexual Satisfaction

Sexual arousal and release (orgasm) are controlled by our involuntary, or autonomic, nervous system. Arousal, getting "turned-on" or sexually excited, is controlled by the passive branch of our involuntary nervous system. *Arousal* happens early in sexual play, in our sleep and even throughout the day. Nipple erection and vaginal lubrication are indications of arousal. To get aroused, we have to be relaxed and soaking in pleasure, because the passive or relaxed branch of our involuntary nervous system has to dominate.

*Orgasm*, however, is controlled by the active branch of our involuntary nervous system. As arousal builds to the point where we are just about to go "over the edge," our body shifts from the parasympathetic nervous system (the relaxed side of our involuntary nervous system) being dominant to the sympathetic nervous system (the active branch of our involuntary nervous system) being dominant. So to have an orgasm, we have to get active and go after it. Many women who struggle to be orgasmic tend to remain passive during their sexual experiences, so they don't help their bodies make the shift to the active nervous system's control.

Sexual arousal and release are conditioned responses. If, as a child or young adolescent, you learned to block intense sexual feelings that would have moved you toward orgasm because of guilt or shame, you may, as an adult, continue unknowingly to stop your arousal before it leads to orgasm. Perhaps you learned to be orgasmic by rocking on your pillow to help you fall asleep as a child and now you have no clue how to transfer that form of stimulation into sex with your husband. Or perhaps you were exposed to pornography or had your first orgasm in response to a negative stimulus, and now you may have to picture that same stimulus to have an orgasm. You are left in a lose-lose dilemma: to have an orgasm and feel guilty about the images in your mind or not have an orgasm and feel sexually unsatisfied. Fortunately, if we have learned to respond or not respond in a certain way, we can retrain our bodies to respond differently.

Even though our bodies have been designed for sexual arousal and release, various factors may interfere with our ability to respond orgasmically. These reasons must be identified and corrected. Any difficulty or inability to reach orgasm after adequate sexual stimulation can be caused by our passivity or previous conditioning, by emotional or sexual trauma, or many possible medical factors.

### **Releasing responsiveness**

How important is it for you to have orgasms? How do you know if you have ever had one? What happens when you are orgasmic? What if you have been trying and nothing seems to work? These are frequently asked questions that need to be answered as an introduction to releasing orgasmic potential.

First, the importance of orgasms is evident because rarely does a woman keep interested in sex if she is not orgasmic. Initially she will be excited and enjoy sex with her husband, but over time she will allow less and less sexual intensity to build and start having sex primarily for him. God designed our bodies to respond sexually, and Scripture teaches that men and women have sexual drives that can be fulfilled in marriage. Having sex for the other person falls short of the mutuality spouses can share together, as taught in **I Corinthians 7**.

How do you know if you've had an orgasm? You know if you have had one by understanding what happens when you do. Arousal builds to a certain intensity causing engorgement, or a building of sexual tension, in the genitals and throughout the body in general. The engorgement triggers the reflex of the orgasm. The orgasm reflex sets into motion contractions in the lower part of the vagina, as well as of the uterus. Think about sneezing: When we sneeze, engorgement in the nasal passages and tingling sensation precede the sneeze. The sneeze releases the build-up in these passages. The same thing happens with an orgasm: the tension build-up in the genitals is released and you feel relaxed and satisfied afterward.

What if you have been trying and nothing seems to work? Stop trying and follow some important steps toward releasing responsiveness. If you are a woman in search of an orgasm, you can find what you are seeking.

***1. Obtain a medical evaluation.*** If something is wrong physically, all the efforts in the world will never produce an orgasm. Start with a hormonal evaluation. Your doctor may be able to prescribe something to help.

Other factors that may interfere with orgasm and require medical attention include childbirth trauma or pelvic surgery. Low blood flow to the genitals due to smoking or cardiovascular problems may be successfully treated with Viagra or other drugs that increase blood flow. Medications for other conditions may suppress your sexual response. For example, Prozac and

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Sex Without Reservations

other antidepressants slow down a man's ejaculation and often make it difficult for a woman to have an orgasm. Work with your physician to find a medication that treats your depression, but doesn't suppress sexual response.

**2. Pursue self-discovery.** Learn to know your body and what feels good to you. Start with a genital self-exam as directed in the book I wrote with my husband, **Restoring the Pleasure** (Word). Then share that discovery with your husband and teach him what type of touch brings you the most pleasure. Discover what conditions you need for sex to be the best it can be for you. As you know and take responsibility to create these conditions, you will more easily free yourself to release your responsiveness. You may resist self-discovery or avoid taking responsibility for your conditions because you believe the myth that if your husband truly loved you, he would automatically know how, where, and when you wanted to be touched and would produce your orgasm for you. Since we as women are much more complex and changeable than men, no man can know and meet our complex and ever-changing sexual needs unless we know ourselves and communicate what our body hungers for in the moment.

**3. Listen to bodily sensations.** To know your body and communicate what you need sexually, you have to be attuned to your body's sexual messages. You can learn to listen to your body and to become the best authority on your body and your sexuality. Listen all day long. Listen in the shower, when you are exercising, and if you have even a flicker of sexual sensation. Listen during sex. Both you and your husband will be happier when you learn to listen to your body and go after what you need while he learns to listen to you and respond to your desires.

**4. Lead by invitation.** Sex works best and responsiveness is most likely when the woman leads with her sexuality, not with pressure from her husband. That is because a turned-on woman is usually a turn-on to a man, but a turned-on man can be a demand or pressure to a woman. If you feel like he is typically ahead of you in both sexual activity and intensity, you may shut down because of the demand you feel to catch-up. Demand always stifles a sexual response.

**5. Distract from watching.** As the saying goes, a watched pot never boils. Even so, a watched woman will not respond sexually. Questions and evaluations either by your husband or by you will put pressure on you and

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Sex Without Reservations

interfere with your natural bodily response. The best distraction is to focus on the sensations of where you are being touched, on the enjoyment of your husband's body, and on the receiving of your husband's enjoyment of your body. You must redefine your goal to go for higher levels and longer times of pleasure rather than for release.

**6. Get active and go after.** Are you withholding from your pleasure because going for your orgasm would be giving in to him? Go for it! Maximize your pleasure. You cannot will an orgasm any more than you can a sneeze, but you can encourage it. When your body gets to the point when it feels like you are about to go over the hill, rather than trying to have an orgasm, work with your body. Practice what we refer to as the orgasmic triggers: when you feel like breathing, breath heavier; when you start gasping, gasp louder; point your toes; throw your head back; make facial grimaces; tighten and relax your vaginal muscles; and thrust your pelvis.

**7. Be deliberate about sex.** Most couples need to make time for physical connection if they are going to learn what the woman needs to build her arousal and release her responsiveness. Yet, couples often resist scheduling their times together. They may believe that spontaneity is better. Our consistent finding is that the anticipation of planned sexual times together builds quality and the allotment of those times increases quantity. It is important that some of these planned encounters be for connecting, cuddling, and passionate kissing without intercourse or the building toward release. Freedom to enjoy each other without any expectations is a prerequisite to you getting to know your body and your sexuality. Sex doesn't always have to mean SEX!

**8. Kiss passionately every day.** Daily passionate kissing keeps the pilot light on so that you can more easily turn up the flame. We recommend 15 minutes a day of face-to-face intimacy—sharing spiritually and emotionally—that ends in 30 seconds of passionate kissing that does not lead to sex. Many times women stop kissing passionately because they fear it will lead to sex and they do not want to go there.

**9. Learn to have fun and play together.** Focus on what is working rather than on what isn't. If you have needed a fantasy that leaves you feeling bad, have fun creating new and exciting fantasies with your husband. Plan creative and experimental times.

## Improve Your Sex Life

### Sex Without Reservations

As you are able to affirm God's design of your sexuality, eliminate all physical barriers, and pursue mutual pleasure with your husband, over time you will have longer and more intense pleasure and eventually you will release all the sexual potential God intended for you with your husband.

**Joyce J. Penner, M.N., R.N.**, and her husband, **Clifford**, are authors of several books, including **Restoring the Pleasure** (Word). This article was published in the Winter 2001 issue of MARRIAGE PARTNERSHIP.

## Reflect

- *How have difficulties in the areas of sexual arousal and satisfaction affected your perspective on your sexual relationship with your husband? How have they affected your sense of self?*
- *Which of Joyce's insights about the physiological and psychological aspects of arousal and sexual satisfaction stand out to you as most helpful? Why?*
- *Some of our inhibitions about self-discovery, learning what feels good, and forming a more sexually-oriented mindset may stem from a Christian upbringing, a sense of modesty, or insecurity. How could a confident biblical understanding of the truth that God is pleased by your healthy sexuality help you overcome some of these barriers?*

## Additional Resources

Want to dig deeper into the topic of sex? Check out these articles and online resources.

### **Beating the Bedroom Blues**

from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

### **A Guide to Better Sex**

from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

### **Keep Sex Fun**

from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

### **Sex after Kids?**

from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

### **Strategic Sex**

from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

### **When Your Sex Drives Don't Match**

from **TodaysChristianWoman.com**

*Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations in this download are from the Holy Bible, New Living Translation, ©2007. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.*

# Subscribe to Today's Christian Woman



## Web + Print

Subscribe now and get complete access to **TodaysChristianWoman.com**, one year of the bimonthly *Today's Christian Woman* digital magazine, and 3 special edition print issues.

Get more TCW Bible studies and resources at **TodaysChristianWomanStore.com**

Subscribe at **OrderTCW.com/sub**

\$9.95