



# *A lifetime of* **GOOD** *sex*

Your guide to better sex at every relationship stage

By **Jamie Beckman** for USA TODAY

**DECISION TIME. YOU HAVE A HOT DATE**  
**D**WITH your partner tonight. If you had the option to have sweet, romantic sex or a down-and-dirty romp (maybe with a little bit of spanking or naughty lingerie), which would you choose? Chances are, your answer is different now than it was 10 years ago, and it'll probably change 20 years from now too. The type of sex we have—and the kind of sex we crave—can change as a relationship progresses.

"We have biological changes, we have emotional changes, and we have psychological changes. All of this means that as people go through life, just like we continually refine our eating behavior and our entertainment choices, we have to refine our sexual routine," says family therapist Marty Klein, author of *Sexual Intelligence*.

Identifying both your partner's needs and your own needs at each stage of your relationship can go a long way toward making your sex life the best it's ever been. Use this cheat sheet to spice up your sex life, whatever stage you're in.





Ask your partner early on about his past sexual experiences

## JUST STARTING OUT

**A BRAND NEW PARTNER MEANS A CLEAN SEXUAL SLATE.** Take advantage of that initial mystery by playfully taking in each other's bodies without the pressure to orgasm.

"I hope that when people are in the very earliest stages of a new sexual relationship, they're being open with each other, they're having sex with the lights on, maybe they're showering or bathing together, maybe they're getting to know each other's bodies in friendly ways rather than the intensity of early sexual exploration," says Klein.

When you're getting to know a person emotionally, in addition to addressing what kind of birth control you'll use and what STD-preventing measures you'll take, you should also get to know each other sexually, based on your past experiences, says psychotherapist Stanley Siegel, author of *Your Brain on Sex: How Smarter Sex Can Change Your Life*. Start with questions like "What have your previous relationships been like?" and then graduate to "Have these relationships been sexual? Have they been sexually satisfying to you?" As the conversation goes on, you might say something like, "Why were they satisfy-

ing? What worked?" and then, "What turns you on?" Siegel admits it's a rather direct approach, but you can glean some excellent information about your partner.

"If you're getting stonewalled, and if someone is extremely uncomfortable, that's really a clue to you not only of how they talk about sex but how they're likely to feel about sex," he says. "Because they're not really talking, they might feel a certain amount of shame or sense of guilt about sex that's holding them back, so that can be a reflection on how they feel about their own sexuality. Which, if you're really interested in having a good sex life, is kind of a red flag."

Along those same lines, the relationship may be new, but don't hide your true sexual self, cautions Dr. Carol Queen, sex educator at San Francisco sex toy store Good Vibrations. Remember to seek your own pleasure and never fake it. If you're not achieving orgasm, tell him. And, Queen warns, "be alert to any signals that your partner doesn't care much about what you want."

## RECENTLY TIED THE KNOT

**EVEN IF YOU'VE BEEN SEXUAL WITH YOUR PARTNER FOR A WHILE NOW,** married sex can be a whole new frontier. Ty-

ing the knot marks the official beginning of your life together, and how you make love deserves just as much attention as your entertainment choices, financial decisions, and religious backgrounds, says Klein. That means getting to know what your partner enjoys when it comes to sex, be it a certain time of day, a certain position, or a certain mood.

"It's not a matter of finding some special sexual thing to do together. It's much more a matter of finding out what makes the other person tick, non-sexually as well as sexually, so that you learn how they like to be spoken to and how they like to be touched," Klein says. "It's very exciting when someone remembers what you like and don't like."

As you start to understand your partner's needs more deeply, you might be surprised at what he enjoys. Despite gender stereotypes, a study from the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University found that frequent kissing and cuddling was a good predictor of men's happiness in their relationships.

As you move further into your relationship, you can explore more elaborate fantasies that you might not have told each other about yet, whether that's surprising your partner with a paddle and a naughty schoolgirl uniform or organizing something more elaborate.

"Ask your partner what they fantasize about," Siegel suggests. "As you get comfortable with someone, you may feel safer in expressing some of those deeper desires. I've known couples in which partners became different characters: They got so bored of sex with each other that the woman got dressed up and went to a bar, and her husband came in, and he was dressed differently than he usually is. They picked each other up, and they had sex as though they were having sex with strangers to shake up the routine of things. They had a great time doing that, and they did it regularly, in different settings and different costumes."





## IN THE MIDST OF PARENTHOOD

**BETWEEN WORK, PEDIATRICIAN APPOINTMENTS, AND GETTING DINNER**

**ON THE TABLE**, time is a precious commodity after you've had kids. To keep the heat on in your marriage, adjust your approach to your sex life. You might have to be intimate in a slightly different way, but all that matters is finding what works.

"Sex doesn't always have to involve intercourse or take 45 minutes," Klein says. "Sex doesn't always have to be at a certain time of day or even in the bedroom. There are also other kinds of erotic or sexual activity people can have with each other, so even if you're not having as much sex as you used to, you can still be affectionate, you can still kiss, you can still grope. You can still go out on Saturday night without panties, and only your husband knows about that."

And believe it or not, you can actually use your packed calendar to your sexual advantage. "Make sex dates," Siegel says. "You know the times when the children aren't there; you should make the effort to really engage in sex during those times. It just has to be ongoing. Whatever the children's needs are, you have to protect your adult needs. Otherwise the relationship becomes much more of a sibling relationship than it does a romantic or sexual, engaged relationship."

## BEEN TOGETHER FOR DECADES

**HERE'S SOME GREAT SEX NEWS:** A recent study from the University of California, San Diego found that in women aged 40 and over, sexual satisfaction actually increased with age. Take advantage of that by keeping sex a part of your routine as your relationship matures.

"Sex should be as much a conversation as the children are, or money is, or work is, or friendship is, so that you don't find yourself in 20 and 30 years looking at each other and not having had sex for five or 10 years," says Siegel.

In fact, a study of retired couples conducted by Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University found that couples who had sex more than once a month



were more likely to report they were "very happy" with their lives than were couples who hadn't had sex in more than a year.

If you've fallen into a rut and haven't been intimate with your partner in a while, Siegel suggests doing a little bit of exploration all by yourself. Find out exactly what turns you on at this stage in your life—for instance, what you think about when you pleasure yourself, whether it's slow lovemaking on a bed of

rose petals or a domination fantasy—and tell your partner about it. It's okay to start small. Just reintroducing touch into your relationship can be a subtle signal that you still desire your partner, Queen says.

"Stay physical with each other and keep sensuality and cuddling on the menu," Queen says. "For some couples, this is simply a time, after kids are out of the house, to stay in bed till noon on the weekends again."

## Three sexy tips to bring you closer

When it comes to relationships, a fulfilling sex life starts with a strong bond between partners. Follow these simple steps to connect with your partner and turn up the heat in the bedroom.

➔ **TOUCH YOUR PARTNER MORE OUTSIDE OF THE BEDROOM.** "Ample touch releases the bonding hormones oxytocin and vasopressin," says sex counselor Eric Marlowe Garrison, author of *Mastering Multiple Position Sex*. "And all touch doesn't have to be sexual. Hold hands, spoon, snuggle at the movies, even let your legs touch when riding the subway. It all helps keep you bonded sexually—by keeping you bonded period."

➔ **GET PLEASURE FROM GIVING PLEASURE.** "Let yourself feel the joy of delighting your partner, so long as it doesn't cause you physical or emotional anguish," Garrison says. "Massaging my partner's feet is not offensive to me, let's say, nor does it turn me on. But it turns my partner on incredibly. I can be happy knowing I am doing something that makes my partner feel good."

➔ **THINK BEYOND THE ORGASM.** "Make sure that your definition of sex goes beyond intercourse and oral exchanges," says Yvonne K. Fulbright, author of *The Better Sex Guide to Extraordinary Lovemaking*. "Such intimacy involves erotic massages, sensual baths, cuddling, kissing.... Couples should maintain physical and emotional touch and intimacy, as this helps them to stay connected and desiring even more of the same."