

SENSATE FOCUS EXERCISES

A series of graduated sensual touch

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DESCRIPTION: The Sensate Focus exercises are sexually therapeutic. They allow for a fun, sensual exploration to help you both get to know each other better sexually. These exercises require you to experience your sexuality more slowly and in smaller compartments, which helps you see your sensuality and sexuality with new eyes. It can help provide intimate insights for identifying your sexual accelerators and sexual brakes. Sensate Focus exercises are a great way to learn new techniques for your lovemaking repertoire that you may have never considered before.

Amanda's honeymoon had been an unpleasant experience to say the least. She felt rushed, used, and unprepared emotionally and mentally for her husband's anxious advances. After learning of the Sensate Focus exercises, she wished she had known about them before her honeymoon. She called them "The Perfect Honeymoon Plan." She felt it would have made for a much smoother transition, a more pleasant experience, and would have provided a positive foundation for their sexual relationship rather than the "rude awakening" she experienced.

With the help of this book, newlyweds will now be much better prepared for a positive honeymoon experience. For those who are willing, the Sensate Focus exercises could be modified to meet both the husband's and wife's needs and provide an ideal sexual transition on the honeymoon or in the early part of marriage. With the Sensate Focus exercises in mind, couples could discuss and create their own plan for the honeymoon to avoid a rude awakening, providing positive and pleasurable sexual memories from the beginning.

When I first learned of Sensate Focus, I knew it would be helpful in our marriage, but for over a year I kept finding excuses as to why we couldn't get started. I had not yet overcome my negative beliefs and inhibitions, so the Sensate Focus exercises filled me with fear and nervousness, bringing all my inhibitions to the surface. This can be viewed as a positive or a negative depending on your determination to overcome barriers and improve your sexual relationship.

If your resistance to do this program is great or if you feel significant discomfort, it may be helpful to go back and review Chapters 2 and 7. The "Home" work assignments in these chapters help to develop a healthy foundation of belief in the sanctity of sexual relations, as well as help remove unnecessary sexual inhibitions. For many couples a review of Chapters 2 and 7 will help provide the necessary conditions to embark upon the sensual adventure of the Sensate Focus exercises. Because some Sensate Focus exercises⁴¹ can be either inappropriate or are "too much, too soon," I have compiled a unique combination of techniques. These self-help techniques are particularly valuable as something couples can do in the privacy of their own relationship, especially since most couples do not have access to good sex therapists. (Sadly, many couples in need would not go to see them even if one was available.)

The system used here is a great way to put a spark into any marriage and can be repeated as often as desired. Going through the exercises or adapting them to meet your needs may be a great anniversary tradition to keep your relationship fresh, alive, and pleasurable.

Discuss with your spouse when you will start this seven-week exercise. You'll need to plan for three opportunities each week. It will increase your success if you schedule these occasions. As you proceed, realize it will require some stretching, patience, and possibly even courage from both of you.

No orgasm or intercourse is allowed until specified in the seventh week. Some couples may think it impossible to go that long without sex. It can be done. Hopefully it is evident that the benefits listed above outweigh the sacrifices. Some couples may not feel a need for this exercise, but I would encourage them to consider doing the exercises anyway for the extra dimension, depth, and revitalization that can occur in an already healthy sexual relationship.

Psychologically, freedom of expression is critical to a relaxed environment in which couples can feel free to appropriately explore, experiment, and express what is mutually pleasurable within the sanctity of their relationship.

Couples should remember the sexual relationship in marriage is like their own private sanctuary. God has ordained marriage and sexuality as good. If couples have any questions or concerns, they may want to review the section in Chapter 7 on “What’s Okay and What Isn’t.”

Couples may want to use special silk bedding, soft music, or candles to provide a comfortable, inviting and relaxing environment. During the exercises each spouse will take a turn being the “giver” or the “receiver.” The giver will touch their spouse for 15– 45 minutes in the specified manner. Always start with the lower-desire spouse being the receiver first. The one receiving the touch always determines when the touching session receiving the touch always determines when the touching session receiving will end; then they will switch roles. To avoid mental distractions and keep the focus on bodily sensations and pleasure, the receiver should focus on their breathing.

1. Nonsexual Touching

Week one is simple. With clothes on, the receiver will choose how they want to be touched nonsexually for 15-45 minutes. The next receiver then chooses how *they* want to be touched nonsexually. This nonsexual touch may include cuddling on the couch, lying together on the bed with arms around each other, giving a back, hand or foot massage, or sitting on your spouse’s lap while your hair is being stroked. The emotional intimacy of this exercise lays the foundation for future fireworks. Do this exercise three times this week.

2. Spooning

Week two is a wonderful opportunity to experience the intimate nurturing position called “spooning.” Both spouses undress and get into bed lying on their left sides. For 15-45 minutes the giver warmly envelops the other in a loving embrace. The receiver’s back is snuggled right next to the giver’s body, like two spoons lying together—one nestled within the other. It may be most comfortable for the giver to put his arm through/under her neck, so that she is not lying directly on his arm. Adjust your pillows so you are comfortable.

Refrain from talking, so that you can savor the sensations of touch, and bask in your closeness. Hands should not touch sexual areas. Pay attention to your breathing, bringing it into harmony until it is synchronized. When the receiver signals, switch positions. The new touch giver will move behind the other so they can still lie on their left sides while spooning.

3. The Blissful Caress

One of the uniquely exquisite forms of touch is something called the Blissful Caress. It is something you can either add to your foreplay and lovemaking repertoire, like a variation of a full-body massage, or something you can do as part of the Sensate Focus exercises to awaken and develop your sexuality as a couple. What is this Blissful Caress, you ask? It’s the most exquisite, barely touching-touch that you can imagine. It sensitizes the body and electrifies it everywhere fingertips touch the skin. I like to call it the “Silent Sizzle.” It’s great sex therapy for you and your spouse!

Both of you (or at least the receiver of the caress) need to be completely undressed. You may want to turn up the thermostat, or have a small heater in the room. This helps to keep the temperature sufficiently warm, since you’ll be lying on your bed naked without covers. When you are in a relaxed and comfortable environment, the body is more able to instinctively let go, so that the natural bodily responses can occur. During the Blissful Caress, it may be helpful to add bedroom music and dim candle light. Decide who will be the giver and the receiver first, then switch after 5-10 minutes each. This exercise can be done where each of you has a turn giving and receiving during the same sexual encounter, or you can let just one of you have the full focus of the Blissful Caress at a time.

During this time, the giver will caress the receiver with the most tender, yet electrifying caress you can imagine. As the giver, imagine your hand drawing sexual energy to the surface of the skin everywhere you touch. You will barely touch the body as your hand slowly glides over her skin from head to toe—including sexual areas. Like a soft breeze blowing across the body, the giver should caress both the back and front of the body with his open hand. As the giver’s hand slides along the body, it will feel almost as if tiny soft kisses are being placed wherever it touches.

The intent of the blissful caress is to awaken sexual sensations from the depths of the soul rather than to simply arouse sexually. This caress sensitizes the body and helps awaken the sexual responses. The giver should make every caress a conscious movement, being attentive to the awakening energy in his or her spouse. As the receiver closes her

eyes and concentrates on savoring every sensation, she may begin to feel sexual stirrings. The whole body should feel electrified with energy, like electricity being brought to the surface just below the touch of the hand. When the receiver signals, the couple will switch roles.

Benefits of the Blissful Caress

There are many benefits of the Blissful Caress. For one thing, they build up positive, pleasurable associations, memories and experiences with touch and sensuality. Here are more benefits:

1. To awaken and increase sensual awareness.
2. To get to know each other's bodies better.
3. To learn to enjoy giving and receiving sensual touch without it leading to sex.
4. To learn to be more conscious, attentive or more fully present in lovemaking.
5. To help women transition into lovemaking by helping her to mentally and physically prepare.
6. To help women tune out mental distractions by focusing on and tuning into physical/sensual sensations.
7. To refresh and re-energize one's sexual relationship.
8. To awaken and excite the mind and body due to its novelty.
9. To help make sure women are getting the foreplay they need in order to fully engage in the lovemaking experience.

So many couples don't spend enough time prior to the main event to help her get sufficiently aroused. This keeps her from experiencing the full extent of the pleasure available in lovemaking. Giving yourself this "foreplay homework" by adding the Blissful Caress to your lovemaking repertoire is a great idea for any couple.

4. Touching and Caressing While Avoiding Genitals

Week four begins direct and definitive sensual pleasuring using the hands and lips to caress, stroke, and kiss the entire body, avoiding breasts and genitals of both husband and wife. Avoiding sexual areas allows the rest of the body to catch up sensually. Where sexual areas usually receive all the attention, the rest of the body will now have a chance to become erogenous, as if learning how to be sexually sensitized.

Again, for three sessions this week the couple will undress in the light, and the receiver will lie down on the bed. She will close her eyes and relax, focusing on her breathing, savoring each touch and caress. The receiver can add to her arousal by expressing her pleasure with auditory expressions such as, "I love it when you . . ." or "I love it when you do that," or even just a blissful "Mmmm!" This teaches or reinforces what is pleasurable in a positive way.

The giver will try to caress every part of the body, except breasts and genitals, noticing the textures and sensitivities of the body. If any touch or caress becomes irritating, the receiver can communicate by moving the giver's hand. Remember it is up to the receiver to teach what touch feels good to them. When the receiver signals, they will switch.

Awakening to tactile pleasure may create a profound sense of aliveness. One woman stated, "I feel like I'm coming out from under an anesthetic. I didn't realize how numb I'd been until I started the exercises."

As husband and wife become re-sensitized to the pleasures of touch, without it leading to sex, a door opens to more frequent touching and closeness. One couple enthusiastically shared their discovery of how their relationship outside the bedroom had changed, "We have a small kitchen, and we used to be forever dodging each other in it. . . . But after we got into the exercises, we just let ourselves bump into each other. Friendly bumps and brushes. Even a few snuggles. I don't know what's going on, but I like it."

5. Kissing

Many couples have lost the art of kissing. Before marriage, kissing is a savored experience. After marriage many couples virtually abandon sensual, lip-to-lip kissing not only because additional sexual pleasures are now available, but for other more intimate reasons. Noted sex therapist, Dagmar O'Connor said, "In its own way, kissing is far more intimate than sexual intercourse. When we kiss, we cannot depersonalize the experience the way we can if we are merely [joining our sexual organs]."

This week, the couple will again undress together. The couple may choose who would like to be the giver first. The husband will sit supported by pillows against the wall or headboard with his legs criss-crossed. The wife will sit on his

crossed legs with her legs around his back. The couple will sit silently for a moment facing each other, connecting and communicating only with the light in each other's eyes.

The giver will then initiate kissing, licking, nibbling or touching the lips, face, neck and ears—being as creative as possible in providing pleasure. The giver should go slowly and concentrate on his own sensations—brushing his lips against hers, or tracing his tongue around her lips. Couples should keep the focus on sensations in the face and neck by avoiding any other sexual contact.

The receiver is to simply relax and relish every kiss. The receiver is not to kiss back, but passively receive the kisses and caresses. At first it may be easier to keep one's eyes closed, but as comfort increases couples may find the increased emotional intimacy of closed, but as comfort increases couples may find the increased emotional intimacy of eye contact a desirable addition. The receiver can communicate nonverbally by pulling away if anything becomes unpleasant. The receiver is to learn new pleasurable sensations, as well as to teach the giver what is pleasurable to them. These sessions will be only 5–15 minutes. The receiver will decide when to switch.

On the third kissing session of this week, husband and wife will both respond to each other's kisses and caresses. Both can give and receive in this shared sensual experience intended to restore the art of sensual kissing to lovemaking.

6. Touching and Caressing Including Genitals

Week six is similar to week four, but with genitals and breasts now being included. Orgasm and intercourse are still prohibited. Couples will again undress in the light. On the first session, the giver will spend at least 15 minutes on the nonsexual areas until the receiver signals that they can move to the breasts and genitals. The giver will touch, caress, and stroke the receiver's entire body.

Intentional touch, which characterizes an attitude of attentiveness, is necessary for these exercises. Love is conveyed in a more powerful way, and pleasure is increased with watchful care of each caress and response instead of with a bored or disinterested attitude.

The receiver should close their eyes and relax, focusing on their breathing, as they continue to savor each touch and caress. This step gives both husband and wife the opportunity to learn to *linger in arousal*, riding the waves of pleasure as they rise and fall throughout lovemaking. To increase her arousal and passion, the wife may want to do Kegel exercises (contractions of the vaginal muscles) during her receiving session, since these mimic orgasmic contractions. The wife must learn to relax and focus her mind on the pleasurable sensations so that she can let go sexually. A willingness to openly and freely communicate sexual pleasure through verbal expression also helps her focus on the sensations and significantly increases her sexual arousal.

Dr. Lindsay R. Curtis taught the following regarding the best kinds of sensual touch in lovemaking. He said, "Caresses must be gentle, never harsh, brusque, or forced. If they are light, fleeting and teasing in nature they serve to arouse the imagination to a much greater degree. When a caress is too prolonged or too persistent, it runs the risk of becoming boring. Even worse it may become irritating or annoying. The lips, the breasts (especially the nipples) and the clitoris are the principal erotic areas, and skillful stimulation of these usually provoke a crescendo desire for [orgasm and] intercourse."

On the *second session*, the receiver will take a more active part. After at least 15 minutes of touch of nonsexual areas, the receiver will move her hand over her partner's to guide him as he stimulates her. This is valuable intimate knowledge for a spouse, as they learn how to give you what you want, when you want it. It is especially important for women to teach their husbands exactly how they like their breasts to be touched. Women often go through life allowing their husbands to touch them in ways that aren't particularly pleasing, instead of teaching them what is pleasurable. A husband's pleasure is always increased by his wife's genuine pleasure and passion. If any touch or caress becomes unpleasant the receiver can move the giver's hand. When the receiver signals, switch roles.

On the *third session*, give each other a guided tour of your body. This may produce some discomfort or even nervousness or shyness, since many have learned to feel shame and embarrassment about their bodies. The purpose is to see and learn about each other's sexual organs and functioning, as well as learn of other sexual hot spots. Decide who wants to go first then, using a mirror if necessary, show and share your sex organs in a teaching manner. Identify your sexual parts and how you like to be touched. Also share the other parts of your body that are your favorite erogenous areas and how you like them to be touched.

7. Orgasm and Intercourse

While couples may now touch back when moved to do so, and orgasm and intercourse are now permissible, couples should still go slowly since relaxation, especially for the wife, is key to full and uninhibited orgasm. With goal-oriented sex being the norm, couples should focus on communicating love as they bask in the sensations of pleasure, even as they proceed to orgasm and intercourse.

The first receiver should be the lower-desire spouse to make their wants and needs the priority. In general, efforts to fulfill the wife's orgasm should come first, since it's difficult for men to keep their sexual flame afire after ejaculation. Seeking to fulfill the wife first helps men gain greater self-control, as they develop greater mastery over their sexual energy. During this week's sessions, begin with (1) nonsexual touching, (2) a blissful caress of the whole body, (3) sensual kissing, and (4) gentle touching of sexual areas in preparation for full sexual arousal and orgasm. Try various positions to find what provides the most pleasure and the right clitoral stimulation.

According to Drs. Lamb and Brinley, orgasm for women is largely a learned response requiring patience, sensitivity, and communication in the relationship.⁴⁶ A relaxed environment free from emotional and psychological barriers is needed. The delicate nature of the female orgasm requires husband and wife to lovingly make a significant investment of time and effort.

If orgasm has been difficult or nonexistent for the wife, you will both need to be creative to find the right intensity, quality, pressure, and type of clitoral stimulation needed to reach orgasm. In the beginning, some women may even need an hour of needed to reach orgasm. In the beginning, some women may even need an hour of direct stimulation. That can be quite a test of endurance. For learning purposes, and if needed after other efforts do not seem to work, some couples may want to consider using a vibrator.

A vibrator can provide a more consistent and enduring source of stimulation to help the wife reach climax. Once a woman experiences orgasm and knows what those intense sensations feel like, a couple can more easily work together to recreate an orgasm with only manual or penile stimulation. Because the vibrator produces an intensity of stimulation that is difficult to manually duplicate, it is wise to make stimulation with a vibrator a temporary learning solution. Couples should work together toward orgasm and complete sexual fulfillment without mechanical assistance during the intimate interplay of their lovemaking.

For more information about sexual therapy techniques couples may want to consider a book by Christian sex therapists, Dr. Clifford Penner and his wife Joyce Penner, entitled *Restoring the Pleasure: Complete Step-by-Step Programs to Help Couples Overcome the Most Common Sexual Barriers*.

One woman, Tami, was thrilled with her response to the Sensate Focus exercises. The phases each built upon the other, softening her heart and mind, while preparing her physically for full and uninhibited sexual ecstasy. She loved the spooning and felt like she was in heaven. She was amazed at the electrifying feelings created by the blissful body caress, as if she was awakening from a deep sleep. Kissing had practically made her sick to her stomach previously but now she enjoyed the full range and depth of intimacy that kissing provided. She could feel how much it increased the intensity of her arousal and pleasure during lovemaking. As she came to understand God's blessing upon the sexual relationship in marriage she was able to relax and let go—finally finding the sexual fulfillment she had been missing for so long.

Affection as well as sexual touch is vital to a healthy and happy marriage. The universal need for touch must be fulfilled with generous helpings of tactile nourishment. The additional issues of developing sexual identity, body image acceptance, nurturing touch and intimate learning can also be important to awakening and freeing mind, body, and spirit to the sexual ecstasy available between husband and wife. All couples can benefit from the Sensate Focus exercises as they gain a fresh new start sexually, and awaken or re-awaken sexual senses.