

Sensate focus 1



Information for patients Sex and Relationship Therapy

Introduction

These are a set of exercises that are designed to help you relax together as a couple and focus on the pleasurable sensations of touching each other. They are the foundation to working on improving your sexual relationship, but at this stage you must agree that you will not have sex.

Exercise 1: Pleasure from touching

This exercise gets you in touch with the pleasure you can derive for yourself from touching your partner's body. It is not about giving your partner pleasure (although, of course, this may happen!), but rather getting pleasure yourself. It involves several processes:

1. Preparation (of yourself, a time and a place)
2. Touching (you touching your partner, then your partner touching you, or vice versa)
3. Ending (a time at the end to reflect together)

More detailed instructions will now be given about each process.

1. Preparation

- **Yourself** – you need to be relaxed and ready, so spend some time unwinding in whatever way is best for you, e.g. listening to music, reading a book, going for a walk etc. Have a bath or a shower to make yourself ready to be together naked.
- **Time** – each week you need to set aside three sessions of about an hour. Many people lead busy lives and find it best to “timetable” or “diarise” these times. Try to spread these sessions throughout the week, at a time when you will not be interrupted. Turn off your phones and lock the doors if necessary!
- **Place** – think about where you want to do these exercises and spend some time creating a pleasant environment. You might want subtle lighting (e.g. small lamps), nice smells (e.g. scented candles) and relaxing music. You will be naked when doing this exercise, so make sure the room is warm. Take it in turns to set up the room.

2. Touching

When you are touching your partner, you have about half an hour to experiment with touching his/her body from head to foot, avoiding particularly sexual areas (breasts, nipples, bottom and genitals).

- Notice what feels good to you.
- Try different types of touching – firm and light touch, long and short strokes, straight and circular movements, using just your fingertips or your whole hand.
- There are so many different ways to touch – be inventive and notice what gives you pleasure.
- Also be aware of your partner's body as you touch it, e.g. the skin texture, temperatures, what it looks like.
- Finally notice what you are thinking, e.g. "This is the first time I have done this", "My mind is wandering", "I wonder if he/she likes this".

Spend about 15 minutes touching your partner's back, from head to toe. If this feels too long at first, spend as long as feels comfortable and gradually build it up each time.

Then spend about 15 minutes touching his/her front, avoiding breasts, nipples and genitals. Then swap over. Make sure you take it in turns to be the first one doing the touching.

At this stage, try to do the exercise without talking – this enables you to focus better on your sensations and thoughts.

In effect, when you are being touched, you are lending your partner your body so he/she can experiment touching it in different ways to find out what gives him/her pleasure. Although it is not primarily about your pleasure, you may enjoy it – notice what is nice but do not make any requests at this stage. You are not expected to endure undue discomfort, so if a touch is painful or unbearably ticklish, let your partner know!

3. Ending

When you have both had a turn at touching, lie together and have a hug for a few minutes. Very briefly talk about what the experience was like (focus on what you noticed that was new or different), but at this stage save your detailed feedback for the next therapy session.

Exercise 2: Pleasure from different media

Once you have got all you can from Exercise 1, repeat this, but introduce touching using a different medium each session. Try:

- Oil (massage oil is generally the best option)
- Lotion
- Talc

Check that the product you are planning on using is OK for both of you – some people have sensitive skin and certain products might not be suitable.

As before, notice what feels good to you as you are doing the touching, but in this exercise, the focus shifts slightly so it is also about what feels good as you are being touched. Continue to avoid breasts, nipples, bottom and genitals. At the end of the session, as you lie together, discuss what felt good.

Exercise 3: Fur, feathers and feet!

This third exercise introduces touching using different materials, objects and body parts. Be inventive and look around the house to find a variety of things to experiment with, e.g. fur, feathers, silk, brushes, shower scrunchies, spoons – the possibilities are endless. You might want to make it into a game by not letting your partner know what you are using to touch him/her. You might want to swap ideas. Remember you can also use different body parts to touch, e.g. feet, arms, hair, lips, tongue etc.

The focus in this exercise shifts even further to what feels good as you are being touched. You can communicate with each other about this as you are touching. Continue to avoid breasts, nipples, bottom and genitals. At the end of the session make sure you lie together for a while.



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