

How To Maintain Sexual Desire In A Long-Term Relationship, According To A New Study

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The longer you are in a relationship with someone, the more certain things become routine, from your dinner schedule to the way you spend free time. Sometimes, sex, too, can become routine and sexual desire may fade. Of course, every couple is different, and lessened sexual desire may not be an issue for you and your significant other. But if you want to know how to keep the spark alive in a long-term relationship, a new report provides some answers. University of Kentucky researchers from the Department of Kinesiology and Health Promotion, Kristen P. Mark and Julie A. Lasslo, decided to research this topic further in their paper titled, “Maintaining Sexual Desire in Long-Term Relationships: A Systematic Review and Conceptual Model,” which appears in *The Journal of Sex Research*. To do so, they looked at 64 articles spanning more than 20 years. The DL? One’s sexual desire may not decrease, but it’s also OK if it does.

“The most universally experienced sexual response is sexual desire,” Mark and Lasslo’s paper states. “Though research on this topic has increased in recent years, low and high desire are still problematized in clinical settings and the broader culture. However, despite knowledge that sexual desire ebbs and flows both within and between individuals, and that problems with sexual desire are strongly linked to problems with

relationships, there is a critical gap in understanding the factors that contribute to maintaining sexual desire in the context of relationships.”

For example, many people assume that arguing in relationships leads to a decrease in desire, but in one 2013 study they found that when men and women had sex for avoidance, aka trying to avoid a fight or conflict, it was seen as a risk factor in maintaining sexual desire in long-term relationships . Similarly, in another study from 2013, they found that partner conflict led to women seeing their partner as less sexually attractive — but thought avoidance was the issue, *not* the conflict.

In their research, Mark and Lasslo found certain common denominators when it comes to keeping the spark, aka sexual desire, alive when in a long-term relationship. Here are some of the factors they discovered.

1Attraction

When it comes to your partner, you are probably attracted to them in many ways, and this will help keep your sexual desire in check. “Another commonly found individual-level factor that contributes to long-term desire is an individual’s feelings of attraction to his or her partner, and this has been studied in a few ways,” Mark and Lasslo’s article states. For instance, when sexual desire is more responsive in nature, especially in women, the authors said attraction to a partner may be important.

2Independence

Although you may know couples who speak for one another and finish each other’s sentences, they probably have their own sense of self, too. Maintaining autonomy is another factor when it comes to keeping the sexual spark alive. One study from 2014 found that in a qualitative study of 33 couples, when it came to their relationships, autonomy meant possibility and discovery. So while it is great to be part of a couple, it’s also critical to maintain your individuality and sense of self.

3Sexual Confidence

Chances are, you know if you’re feeling confident at any given time, and this goes for within your romantic relationship, too. And, yes, having confidence and self-esteem can help when it comes to your level of sexual desire. One example that Mark and Lasslo gave came from a 2015 study that found that when someone prioritizes themselves as a sexual being, it can help increase and maintain sexual desire.

4Emotional Intimacy

You know how you may have a more fulfilling sexual relationship with somebody when you are more emotionally connected? This is where emotional intimacy comes into the picture. To maintain sexual desire, one’s response to their partner’s emotional closeness

can help, a study from 2009 found. Intimacy on a daily level, too, can increase sexual desire, a 2012 study found within a sample of mixed-sex couples.

5 Good Communication

Relationship experts often say “communication is key” when it comes to you and your partner, and they’re right. In terms of maintaining sexual desire, Mark and Lasslo’s research also found communication to be an important factor, and they cited many sources to back this up. For instance, regarding relationships, they said there is a strong link between communication and satisfaction outcomes. Additionally, sexual communication was another way to connect couples and bring them closer, which could increase desire.

Interesting findings, right? [Dr. Rachel Needle](#), licensed psychologist and Certified Sex Therapist in West Palm Beach, FL, and the Co-Director of [Modern Sex Therapy Institutes](#), too, has some advice on [keeping the sexual spark alive](#) in a long-term relationship.

What To Do If You Feel Like The Sexual Spark Is Fading — And Why That Is OK

Mark and Lasslo’s article uncovered much research about how sexual desire waning is normal. For instance, they cited a 2015 study that looked at sexual desire discrepancy, where a couple does not have the same sexual desire — one person has a higher desire than the other — and found that referring to these desire changes as “normal” helped. Of course, many variables come into play when it comes to one’s sexual desire decreasing.

“There are a number of potential factors that can contribute to a partner’s decreased sexual desire or disinterest in sex,” Dr. Needle says. She says these can include, but are not limited to: hormonal/biological factors, interpersonal factors, intrapersonal factors, contextual factors, lack of appropriate stimuli, expectation of negative outcomes, and issues within the relationship.

“It is important to communicate with your partner if their disinterest is impacting you and/or the relationship,” she says. The important thing is to recognize that these factors are OK and don’t mean your relationship is doomed.

But How Can You Increase Sexual Desire?

You may be comfortable with [the amount of sex in your relationship](#), but if you and your partner want to revamp it, there are a few easy things you can try. “Remember the seduction and build-up of anticipation that was present at the beginning of the relationship, regardless of how long you have been in a relationship,” Dr. Needle says. “Don’t make things so routine. You don’t want to lose the sense of adventure and surprise, so break the predictable pattern every so often.”

On a related note, Dr. Needle also suggests trying something new. “Commonly, couples adopt a fairly predictable sexual script,” she says. To spice up the romance, she suggests role-playing or dressing up and enacting a fantasy, changing the scenery, and/or introducing new objects (food or sex toys) into your sexual activity. “You can also try new patterns of making love, including different positions and different places. Also, consider going to a workshop together or seeing a certified sex therapist. Therapy is not necessarily reserved for an identified ‘problem,’ but can be about education, growing, and personal development.”

On the other hand, as much as spontaneous sex can spice things up, you can also try scheduling sex. “Life can get busy and things can get in the way of being physically intimate with your partner,” Dr. Needle says. “Plan time to engage in sexual activity with each other and write it in pen in your datebook. Planning ahead can build anticipation and excitement, and can maintain the health of the relationship.”

As you can see from Mark and Lasslo’s research, as well as Dr. Needle’s suggestions, there are ways to keep the sexual spark alive in a long-term relationship, and many of the suggested methods seem simple. But it’s important to remember, only you and your partner know how much sex you both want and need, so communication may be first on the list when you broach the top of your sex life. After all, sex should be a benefit to your life, not a chore.