

What to Do When Everything in Your Relationship Is Great—Except the Sex

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Help for when sparks are *not* flying in the bedroom

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Maybe the sex was all rockets and fireworks when you first met, but it's been a while since you've felt sparks. Or you're in a newish romance which is promising in every way, except that you just don't feel sexually in sync. Is it you—or him? And is your otherwise great relationship doomed just because you can't build heat between the sheets?

No, say the experts. "It takes some work, but it's usually solvable," says Holly Richmond, PhD, psychologist and certified sex therapist in Southern California. Here's how to turn things around so you rock your relationship in and out of the bedroom.

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Rule out a health problem

Whenever sex becomes an issue for a couple, it's smart to investigate any potential medical causes first. "Is the sex not good because of pain, anxiety, a medication you're on? I would want to check those things off the list before we start working on the relationship," says Richmond. Drugs are a sneaky bad-sex culprit: Pain meds can put a dent in your libido, and certain antidepressants, such as Prozac and Zoloft, also sink your sex drive.

Talk it over

Okay, so nobody wants to approach the partner they're crazy about and admit that they're not feeling it sexually. But "wanting changes in your sexual relationship can present an opportunity for increased communication in the relationship," says Rachel Needle, PsyD, sex therapist and co-director of the Modern Sex Therapy Institutes. In other words, opening up can actually bring you closer together.

The best approach is to come from a place of curiosity, says Richmond. If the frequency of sex is a problem, try saying, "I'm curious why we're not having as much sex as we used to," as opposed to, "I hate that we don't have sex anymore. What's going on with you?" If you feel out of sync with your partner, pose it like this: "It's like we're dancing to a different beat. What can we do to get in the same groove?"

Get specific about what isn't working, and offer solutions so the conversation is constructive. You might say something like, "It seems like you're not that into it during foreplay. What if I change up the pressure or rhythm?" says Richmond. "I want couples to be really explicit in asking for what they want," she adds. "It just doesn't get the job done to say, 'That's good,' or, 'That's not.'"

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Take to the bedroom

Once you've put the problem out there and discussed possible solutions, get in the bedroom and give things a try. Maybe you both agree you need more foreplay to ignite sparks, or novelty and pushing boundaries could solve the problem. Whatever the issue is, be open to creative ways to tackle it, says Needle—by role-playing, changing the scenery, playing slow jams to help you get your bodies in tune, or introducing sex toys.

This might sound counterintuitive, but Richmond encourages couples she works with to masturbate on their own as well. Instead of focusing your sexual attention away from your partner, it actually helps bring you together because masturbation teaches you what turns you on and what it takes for you to orgasm, she says. Clueing your partner in can help rebuild the fire that's been missing or help you both try new moves and positions.

Seek outside help

If you two still aren't burning up the sheets but you're committed to trying, it might be time to call in an expert. A sex therapist can help partners identify their "erotic templates," which Richmond defines as each person's biggest turn-ons. A professional can also make it easier to be honest about what's not working and what you want.

"[Sex] therapy isn't necessarily reserved for an identified 'problem,'" says Needle. "It can be about education, growing, and personal development as well as trying something new."