

Discover your true sexual self

Porn, “pleasure objects”, dangerous liaisons, wild positions — these are all the cliched routes to sexual excitement. But, say the sexperts, they’re not the way to discover your true sexual self. Forget the fast and the furious; instead, it’s about taking your time to allow the mind and body to get truly connected. “Even couples who have great sex lives have no idea what they’re missing,” says the relationship expert Jan Day. “There’s a tiny minority who even realise it’s possible. It involves a much deeper, more subtle energy.” And the reward? “Delicious” sex, where pleasure fills your whole body. With a little commitment and focus, sexual nirvana is not so distant. Here’s how:

Resensitise your emotions

There’s no point getting in touch with your body if you’re not in touch with your feelings. Day argues that many of us shut down emotions that feel too uncomfortable — embarrassment, shyness, anger. What’s more, we cover them up with overdrinking, eating, working, even TV-watching. The first step is getting used to feeling them again: “We need to be willing to face our own discomfort. It’s about being a bit more honest.” Try stone-cold sober dancing in public. No, really — do! 5Rhythms and No Lights No Lycra are both useful dance classes. “As we move our bodies, we feel more,” says Day. Writing a journal, and drawing (if you can or like to) are also good ways of turning inwards. What you’re aiming for, says Day, is space to be with whatever is happening inside you — and able to share it with your partner or at least to be seen in it. “Often, our emotional life isn’t appreciated because it is associated with dumping on our partner, or turning ourselves into a victim,” says Day. “When we can be with — and be transparent with — what we feel, our intimacy deepens.”

Resensitise your senses

In order to cope with an argy-bargy world, our senses shut down. Mindfulness is an excellent exercise for countering that desensitisation, as it encourages us to be present to taste, smell, sound, touch. Day suggests spending 10 minutes eating a strawberry, paying attention to every cell: “It’s as if you’ve never eaten a strawberry before,” she says. Tune into “micro pleasures” to open up those senses — the touch of warm water on the skin in a shower; the smell of shower gel, for example. Savour your food; focus on your breath; appreciate nature (which you can do even in cities). Day also advises doing pelvic-floor exercises, which will “bring feeling — and blood — back to the area”.

Ramp it up

Now you’re ready to remove your clothes. Proceed gently with a lover, says Day. Think tantric: “Bring everything to your attention, their skin, their smell, and gradually move into more sexual situations. These small steps ensure that you’ll always feel safe — if it goes wrong, it won’t be too much. Emotional safety is critical. “We have to know that we feel safe, that we have control, and when we say no, it means no,” she says. “The more we can get comfortable with all the things we’re uncomfortable with, the safer we feel. It’s like using a muscle.”

Stay relaxed

Focused breathing and staying relaxed is the key to deeper, longer pleasure: “They will help you soften your musculature,” says Day. “Breathe out to soften everything — and you have to be willing to let go of peak excitement.”

Sex balls are good

Vibrators, however, are not. “We tighten up and tense against them,” says Day. Vibrators are good for quick, short, sharp gratification, but if you relax into it rather than tighten when close to the peak, then “we can go on for much longer and deeper”. Subtler than a vibrator are smart balls: two rigid plastic balls that sit inside you. “They can be really sensual if you allow it,” Day says. And you can do it in the supermarket. Buying lovely underwear can feel sexual, too, even if it’s just for you.

Reconnect the heart and body

Most of us separate heart and body to protect ourselves. “If we open our hearts as well as our bodies, then sexual connection can feel much more scary because there’s nothing held back,” Day says. Thus, for many of us, one-night stands are less pressured than, say, telling someone we love them for the first time. “There is a way to bring those two together,” Day says. “It’s about moving beyond the erotic and getting off the hook of excitement. This is about another way of having sex.” How? By having the courage to to open up our love, “so we can move into deeply intimate relationships, where we’re vulnerable and really present”.

Porn and all that

Porn and toys, bondage and domination and all those other thrills don’t open our hearts — “hard” and exciting moves sex away from vulnerability. “If you cut into that [hard] pathway too soon, it can be more difficult to come back.” Day advises developing that strength of emotional connectedness first. Then, once that’s established, you can experiment with less vanilla themes.

Getting out of a rut

So you’ve been married for yonks, and the sex has become routine. It needn’t feel doomed. “Let your partner know you love them and that you want to experience sex from a new angle,” Day says. They’ll probably be thrilled to hear it. But you have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone and away from the “leftovers”, the bits that remain in your sex life after all the elements that one or the other partner doesn’t like have been thrown out. Step back from these known shortcuts to making each other come; have a pause from sex, return to innocent body massage and recalibrate. Then, slowly, one step at a time, begin to experiment with things that don’t feel so comfortable. “You have to build a resilience to be able to chart new territory,” Day says. Create a new menu and discover what you really like — and be sure to tell each other. Whenever the sex gets boring, go back to massage. “It all comes back to being present to what we’re feeling,” Day says. “We have to be truthful to ourselves and have the courage to feel. Then we can begin to have lovely, delicious sex.”