

DO YOU
HAVE

Erotic Intelligence?

If you want to give your sex life a lift, switch off your brain and turn on your body. Homework has never been more fun!

The days of intelligence being measured by IQ alone are thankfully long gone. We now know emotional intelligence is as important as academic ability for living a successful life. But there's another kind of intelligence that's still often overlooked – one that a number of experts believe could hold the key to improving relationships, increasing happiness and even boosting earning power. It's called erotic intelligence. And no, it's not about taking pole-dancing lessons or studying the *Kama Sutra* (unless you want to). It involves nurturing your sensuality so that your sexual confidence grows alongside your personal confidence, rather than languishing behind it.

It seems like we're finally waking up to the idea that our sex lives are worth investing in. Non-sleazy erotic retreats are springing up, such as those from relationship coach Jan Day

(janday.com), where couples or individuals can work on intimacy and passion. Exploring sexuality is no longer just for those on the 'sexual fringes' of society – it's gradually becoming more mainstream, says relationship psychologist Susan Quilliam, who runs sell-out courses and workshops on sex at London's trendy – and well respected – School of Life. 'A sign that our erotic intelligence

'It's not about low-cut clothes; it's about authentic charisma'

is growing is that we are now happy to talk about it with a room full of strangers. I was asked to talk about sex at the University of Cambridge's Festival of Ideas last year,' says Quilliam, 'As recently as 10 years ago that wouldn't have happened.'

Just as therapy became more acceptable when the idea of emotional intelligence grew, more of us are seeking professional help for our sex lives, says Quilliam. 'I offer sex coaching for couples and singles and what I've noticed is that people aren't necessarily coming because sex is a problem, they're coming to make their sex life even better.'

TAKING PLEASURE

The obvious beneficiary of a boost in erotic intelligence is your relationship. But as there's a synergistic element to all aspects of intelligence, raising erotic intelligence could affect your IQ – and success – in general. Sex enhances the regeneration of brain cells, including those in the hippocampus, where long-term memories are formed. And people who have 'erotic capital' – defined as 'sexual competence, energy, erotic imagination, [and] playfulness' – tend to do better in the workplace, earning an average of 10-15% more than less erotically intelligent colleagues. Of course, it's not about wearing low-cut tops, but having authentic charisma.

While it's easy to sideline sex when busy, increasing erotic intelligence can mean sex takes less effort and feels like a treat, not a task. This glow spills into the rest of your life, says relationship counsellor Val Sampson, author of *How To Have Great Sex For The Rest of Your Life*. 'Your sexuality is a key life force. It boosts your senses and creates a sensuality which energises your daily life, helping you take pleasure in the world around you.'



way, can be undervalued in a relationship. Around 61% of us say we want more cuddling and touching from our partners.

We know being touched releases feel-good chemicals, such as oxytocin, and that it's a form of emotional communication. In studies at the Touch and Emotion Lab at DePauw University in the US, volunteers tried to communicate emotions – including anger, fear, love, gratitude, sympathy and happiness – to a blindfolded stranger solely through touch. The emotions were correctly interpreted 78% of the time.

But while touch is so important to keeping us emotionally and erotically in tune, studies show touching in long-term relationships tends to peak in the first few years, then tapers off.

YOUR EI HOMEWORK Try a 'yes-no' session. Set a timer for 15 minutes. One partner does the touching; the receiver is naked, passive throughout and focuses purely on the sensations. The stroker tries different things – soft strokes, tickling or squeezing. Touching sexual areas is fine, but penetration is banned. The receiver must say 'yes' or 'no' to each sensation and be honest. It's about learning what each other likes and creating trust. After 15 minutes, switch.

Step 1 Develop A Curious Mind

Sexual desire evolves throughout your life. Developing a 'growth mindset' – being open to new experiences – is essential for boosting academic intelligence and you can apply this mindset to sex. 'Collect as much information as you can so you can work out what you want. More foreplay? More varied sex? A bowl of chocolate-dipped strawberries to take to bed?' says Sampson. 'And allow yourself to fantasise – the more outrageous, the better. Use erotic literature if you need inspiration.'

YOUR EI HOMEWORK Have a

sensual shower. You can learn what you like by tuning into your body, but in a busy life it's easy to live in your head alone. Instead, focus on your body's responses. How does it feel when you wash your skin? Or shampoo your hair? What bits feel sensitive? Which are tickly? Starting the day like this switches you into a curious mindset from the get-go.

Step 2 Use Touch

Of all the five senses, touch is integral to increasing your erotic mojo and is known as the 'mother of all senses' as it's the first sense to develop in embryos. But the habit of touching, in both a sexual and non-sexual

Step 3 Take A Risk

When couples become established, the tone of most relationships veers towards safe and secure. That's good for your emotional health, but being too 'cuddly' with each other can create an asexual dynamic, says Day. 'What's truly erotic tends to come with a slightly scary or dangerous edge,' she says. And you can achieve that without straying into the realm of bondage or alfresco sex. 'You can create the erotic charge that comes through risk by simply having a conversation,' says Day.

YOUR EI HOMEWORK Have a 'risky' conversation. Set the timer for 10 minutes. One partner talks, the other ➤

listens. Think about what would scare you to share with your partner. What has made you feel vulnerable in your relationship that week? 'That's what you need to share. Your partner then reflects back their understanding of what you've said,' says Day. The aim is to help your partner gain an understanding of how you think – both about sex and your life together in general. 'Allowing yourselves to feel vulnerable is the key to deeper intimacy,' says Day.

Step 4

Slow It Right Down

The slow-food movement grew as an antidote to fast-food culture, and now there's 'slow sex' – an alternative to the hurried sexual encounters we squeeze into our busy lives. Counterintuitive as it may feel, the aim of slow sex is to avoid – rather than reach – orgasm. It's derived from ancient tantric tradition, but it's been brought into the mainstream by US sex therapist Diana Richardson.

Sometimes also known as 'cool sex', the aim is to avoid the hyper-aroused feelings of 'hot sex'. 'You're not trying to reach a peak of ecstasy; it's just

about being with each other in a very close and intimate way,' says Tim Broughton, who runs Making Love Retreats based on Diana Richardson's techniques (opentolife.co.uk). And contrary to what you may think, having sex without orgasm is energising, he says. 'It revs up your sexual energy so getting aroused comes more naturally.' Resisting the urge to make orgasm the 'event' of every sexual encounter is an antidote to the feeling it is too much effort.

YOUR EI HOMEWORK Have a slow sex session. Set aside two or three hours when you won't be disturbed (send the kids on a play date). Start by sitting

facing each other, making eye contact and doing some deep, slow breathing. Then move onto slow, gentle stroking, avoiding the genitals and breasts, and keeping your awareness on every sensation. You can kiss – but without tongues. It doesn't have to be ultra-serious – humour can help and it's OK to stop or take a break for a cup of tea, but try to stay in the moment by keeping conversations on how you're both feeling. You can include penetration, but you have to let go of the idea of trying to make something happen and focus on letting things happen instead.

Step 5

Rewire Your Brain For Eroticism

In recent years, scientists have discovered that the brain's vagus nerve is responsible for the ability to orgasm, says sex therapist Mike Lousada (mikelousada.com). 'If you don't feel safe, the vagus nerve will stop you from reaching orgasm. If you have felt guilt, shame or fear about sex in the past, you may have created a neural pathway that triggers those feelings, even if they're outdated.' But you can rewire your neural pathways for pleasure.

YOUR EI HOMEWORK Use a mantra. Affirmations can rewire neural pathways to link sex with positive emotions. 'Simply saying, "I feel good about sex" to yourself can change any unconscious conditioning that you may not be even aware of,' says Lousada. ♦



'Increasing My Erotic Intelligence Changed My Life'

Susi Barrett, 52, from Berkhamsted in Hertfordshire, is communications director for a technology company

'At 40, my long-term relationship ended. I'd imagined spending the rest of my life with this man and having children. I was single for nearly a decade after that, until I realised I had to make some changes. A friend recommended a dating workshop run by relationship coach Jan Day, which looks at ways to achieve relaxed and open connections with others.

Sex was never talked about when I was

growing up, and even my periods came as a big shock as no one told me what to expect. All that was ever said was that sex was something I shouldn't ever think about or do!

I realised I had a deep conviction that enjoying sex was bad. I then booked a one-to-one coaching session with Jan, which made me realise I'd never been honest in my relationships and tended to end things rather than deal with conflict.

I've since done several workshops and feel as if my life has been transformed – I'm comfortable in my own skin for the first time, I feel full of energy and more open in all my relationships, including the one with my new partner. For me, being more erotically intelligent is about fully accepting my body and enjoying it, being in tune with all five senses and seeing sexual pleasure as something natural to be enjoyed.'

