

Partner Sensate Focus

Masters and Johnson developed "Sensate Focus" as a component of sex therapy and it has been used in most sex therapy settings for over three decades. It was originally designed to minimize "anticipatory anxiety", or the anxiety that a partner has prior to a sexual encounter when fearing the outcome of that encounter. It also targets "spectatoring", which Masters and Johnson described as "watching oneself" while being sexual. Now we will use these exercises very deliberately to heighten your sense of awareness when being sexual with a partner. The exercises offer an approach to sexual enrichment. They are helpful to couples seeking exercises designed to correct nonphysical erectile problems and to enhance orgasmic response. But they are recommended to anyone wishing to enhance intimacy and communication during sexual activity.

The exercises are divided into three progressive stages. Master each stage before moving to the next. For example, couples may spend a several lovemaking sessions at one stage before moving on to the next. Repeat all previous stages each time. The pace depends on your progress and comfort.

Helpful suggestions:

- Decide on a way to communicate during these exercises. Some couples use verbal signals. Some use a "rating scale" from 1-10, where "1" is not pleasurable, "5" is neutral and "10" is the most intense pleasure. Others use "hand over hand" technique where the one being touched takes the partner's hand and thus controls the degree of pressure as well as the pattern and length of strokes.
- Plan to do the exercises when you and your partner are rested and not pressed for time. Don't do the exercises after a heavy meal or when you have had a disagreement.
- Be creative. Use all your senses, not just touch. E.g. aromatherapy, sexy lingerie, erotic stories, and soft lighting can enhance sensory pleasure.
- After the session, you will want to discuss your experience and share positive as well as negative feelings with your partner.

Stages of Sensate Focus:

The partners take turns being the giver and the receiver. Remember, touch can be in many forms – firm, light, with fingernails or feathers – be creative and watch and listen to your partner for clues to their enjoyment.

Stage 1: You and your partner will take turns touching each other's bodies, head to toe, but the genitals and breasts are off-limits. The goal is not to evoke or sense sexual arousal; rather, it is to focus on and be mindful of the sensations generated, describing them at each stage in a non-judgmental way. The person

doing the touching uses their own interest and curiosity to guide where and how to touch. The person receiving the touch should provide feedback (verbal or non-verbal) to their partner about where to touch and not touch. After approximately 15 minutes, the roles are reversed and who previously was the receiver of touch now becomes the giver.

Stage 2: In the next stage of sensate focus, touching is expanded to include the breasts and genitals. The person doing the touching is instructed to begin with general body touching, not to immediately move to the genitals or breasts. Again the emphasis is on awareness of physical sensations and not the expectation or anticipation of sexual arousal. Intercourse remains off-limits.

Take turns trying a "hand riding" technique as a means of nonverbal communication. By placing one hand on top of your partner's hand while being touched, you can indicate if you would like more or less pressure, a faster or slower pace, or a change to a different spot. The goal in providing your partner with this feedback is to give him/her some guidance, not to control how he/she is touching you.

Stage 3: In stage 3 of sensate focus, instead of taking turns touching each other, try some mutual touching. The goal is to practice a more natural or real life form of physical interaction, and to help each partner shift attention to a portion of his or her partner's body and away from watching his or her own response. Remember that no matter how sexually aroused you feel, intercourse is still off limits.

Later Stages of Sensate Focus: The next stages of sensate focus are to continue with the mutual touching, then at some point to move into the female-on-top position without attempting insertion of the penis (or dildo) into the vagina.

In this position, you can rub your partner's genitals against your own, regardless of the presence of arousal. Then, you may progress to putting the tip of the penis (or dildo) into your vagina, all the while focusing on the physical sensations and stopping or moving back to non-genital touching if either partner becomes orgasm oriented or anxious.

Note that in Stages 2, 3, and beyond that orgasm and/or ejaculation is not the primary goal. However, if the couple wish to proceed to this stage of arousal, that is acceptable.