

Nourishing your sexuality

WRITTEN BY Chelsea Craig, ATC

We spend a lot of time worrying about our physical health, eating right and exercising, but what about your sexual health? Taking care of yourself isn't just about what you eat or how much you move, it's also about being in a healthy, fulfilling sexual relationship. That's not to say you have to be in a monogamous relationship to have a thriving sex life and get all the perks of sex extended beyond the bedroom. What is important is that you pay particular heed to your sexuality and take care of your genitals and carnal rights as sensual beings.



The positive effects of sex

Being in the mood has significant positive effects on your health beyond the feel-goods. Many studies have been conducted to examine the relationship between sexual activity and physical health. They have found a thriving and juicy sex life fosters anything from lower stress, lower blood pressure and improved heart health to pain management and anti-aging properties. Researchers say those who have sex often, twice a week or more, respond better to stress and have lower diastolic blood pressures due to the increased release of oxytocin, which decreases how narrowed blood vessels react to stress. They also had higher levels of antibodies to fight infection and increased endorphins fighting depression, and an overall happier and healthier life.

Let's not forget, they don't call it getting hot and steamy for nothing. Sex can be a decent cardiovascular workout and a great mode of exercise. It takes both physical strength and psychological work to do it well. Thirty minutes of time spent between the sheets burns 85 calories or more. That may not seem like much, but it's fun watching it add up: it takes 42 half-hour sessions to burn 3,570 calories equaling 1-pound of fat lost. Double up and you could drop that pound in 21 hour-long sessions. It's no wonder those who have an active sex life have improved heart health, better self-esteem and stronger muscles. They're getting physical in the most enjoyable of ways.

Want to look younger and live longer? Have more sex. According to research, those who reported having sex three times a week appeared seven to 13 years younger than their actual age. The youthful glow is believed to be from the release of the DHEA hormone during sex. DHEA has anti-aging properties that increase the production of collagen, smoothing out and reducing wrinkles.

All these health benefits are great in theory, but how do we take them from conceptual to physical? Great sex doesn't just happen — it takes finesse, intimacy, confidence and seduction. It's not a simple recipe, but it's one that

when done correctly quite literally yields orgasmic results.

"(It is) important to be present when you are being intimate with your partner," said Theresa Hubbard, a licensed clinical marriage and family therapist who owns A Journey Home wellness retreat in Dearborn, Mo. "It creates a true connection. Most people aren't present when they're being sexual with their partner. They're worried about how they appear, what their partner's thinking or how their performance is."

She recommends practicing mindfulness while being intimate with a partner. It not only helps nurture a positive sex life for you, but helps the partner feel valued and appreciated, a feeling everyone wants.

"It is important relationship-wise, whether you're married or not, to be truly connected with the person you're being intimate with. It forms a deeper intimacy, trust, appreciation, compassion and respect," Hubbard said. Mindfulness in all aspects of life takes practice and fosters a sense of self-confidence for a healthy demeanor all-around.

Great sex through food

One way to ignite our passion flame is through our stomachs. Named after the Greek goddess of sexual love and beauty Aphrodite, aphrodisiacs are foods that have powers on our libidos evoking or stimulate sexual desires. Creating a longing in our loins or arousing the mind, true aphrodisiacs are foods that can make our bodies produce more of the chemicals associated with eroticism. According to researchers, certain ones stimulate the production of hormones or chemicals that enhance our sexual appetite. Whether because of their shape, aromas or "love" powers, there are a select few foods that are reportedly aphrodisiacs.

The avocado tree, or "testicle tree" to the Aztecs, bananas, cucumbers and carrots are aphrodisiacs due to their phallic shape. Seductively tempting us to eat them, these erotic foods are rich in potassium, vitamin B and omega-3 fatty acids, having a physical impact on the reproductive organs, strengthening and giving hormonal support. The fig and

papaya also fall under the 'risqué foods' category.

Other rousing consumables include cardamom, anise, nutmeg and ginger, which are spices that increase blood flow and enhance love and lust. In Eastern Medicine, nutmeg is a prized aphrodisiac that may increase mating behaviors while anise has estrogenic compounds, which have reported to affect sexuality. And oysters may not look sexy, but dating back to ancient Rome they have been reported to improve sexual potency in men and have compounds that aid in the release of sex hormones.

But the mother of all aphrodisiacs is chocolate. Forever associated with romance and sexuality, Mayans worshipped cacao (the raw form of chocolate), naming it the food of the gods. Rumors suggest the Aztec ruler Montezuma drank 50 cups of chocolate each day to enhance his sexual abilities. To support the ancient amative, research suggests cacao

to contain phenyl-ethylamine and serotonin, which are the body's feel-good chemicals.

These foods are what would be part of a healthy diet promoting weight loss and thus libido-boosting potential. Being overweight or obese can be bad for the bedroom, with both being well-known risk factors for erectile dysfunction,

low testosterone and infertility. Aiding in shredding pounds, these foods not only enhance sexual function, but they allow you to feel better about yourself and more sexually desirable.

A thriving and juicy sex life fosters anything from lower stress, lower blood pressure and improved heart health to pain management and anti-aging properties wholesome.

To make sure you do not become one of many who are unsatisfied with their sex lives, talk about sex, share sexual fantasies, experience it (safely) without judgment and become knowledgeable about your anatomy and needs. Like anything else, your sex life needs to be nourished to thrive. Sensually, intimately and erotically cherish and cultivate your sexual health. ^{LW}KC

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