

Sensate Focus Exercises

Sensate focus exercises were developed by sex therapists Masters & Johnson. They can be used by any couple seeking to explore a new kind of intimacy.

These exercises are typically done in steps or stages over a period of several weeks. One person starts as the “giver” or “toucher” and the other is the “receiver.” Partners then switch roles until they reach stage 3, when there is mutual touching. If you do the exercises in the morning, you can enjoy other sexual activity in the afternoon or evening, or whatever timing works for you. The key is to not mix exercises with your normal sexual activities.

Stage 1

Touching, stroking, or kissing can occur anywhere on the body, except the breasts and genital areas. Use the hand that you don't normally write with (so if you're right-handed, use your left hand). If you are the giver, start with your partner's face. Take your time and explore every area of your loved one's body. You can also explore different types of touch, such as rubbing, squeezing, or tickling. The goal is to experience the sensation of touching, not to try to sexually arouse your partner. Even if your loved one gets aroused, do not try to have an orgasm. After 20-30 minutes (or longer, if you like), switch roles. Practice this exercise 2-3 times a week for 1-2 weeks.

Stage 2

Start with stage 1 touching. Then you can begin to explore the breast and genital areas, but do not attempt intercourse, or touching that leads to orgasm. After 20-30 minutes, switch roles. Practice this exercise 2-3 times a week for 1-2 weeks before moving to stage 3.

Stage 3

During this stage, you will engage in mutual touching, beginning with stage 1 touching, and then progressing to stage 2 touching. Even if you both become sexually aroused, do not engage in touching that might lead to orgasm. Practice this exercise 2-3 times a week for 1-2 weeks before moving to stage 4.

Stage 4

Start with touching exercises from stages 1-3. Then get into position, as if you are going to have intercourse (but do not have intercourse). Move your bodies so that both partners' genitals can rub against each other. After one or two sessions, you can then progress to partial or full intercourse or touching or oral sex that may lead to orgasm. It may help to have a lubricant nearby so you don't need to interrupt the action to locate lube.

Touch, but don't talk

Do not talk during your sessions, as it can be distracting. Decide ahead of time what physical cues you can give each other to indicate when certain touching feels good (perhaps the receiver caresses the giver's hand), or if you want more pressure (the receiver can press down on the giver's hand). If you don't like the touching, gently pull your loved one's hand away. After each session is over, you can discuss what worked—or what didn't.

To order an instructional DVD, visit www.hsab.org