

EXERCISE YOUR WAY TO BETTER SEX

If you want to improve your sex life, then get that body moving! **David Goding** reports on the benefits exercise has in the bedroom.

According to the health experts, it seems there's nothing regular exercise can't enhance. Essential for heart health, maintaining body shape and definition, reducing stress and keeping you energised and happy, it now appears that exercise can also help improve your sex life and body confidence. Physiologically, exercise improves circulation, increases muscle tone and releases a variety of feel-good chemicals. Psychologically, it builds self-esteem, making you feel sexier and increasing your desire.

"The sexual benefits of exercise are not something that's talked about in weight-loss advertisements, but they are well established," explains Dr Gabrielle Morrissey, a sex and relationship therapist. "A lot of the couples I see want to take a pill-popping approach to boost their sex life, but, in actual fact, the first-line treatment for the majority of people is to make changes to your lifestyle, and that starts with decreasing stress and increasing physical activity levels."

On the flip side, a sedentary life is not conducive to an active sex life because it causes a reduction in fitness, energy levels and motivation. "The more active you are,

the more things you get done in general, and that includes sex," says Weight Watchers Fitness Editor Martha Lourey-Bird. "Living a sedentary lifestyle is also going to increase your chances of obesity and other health risks, as well as decrease your libido and sexual performance," she adds.

BOOSTING YOUR HEALTH AND BODY CONFIDENCE

Exercise and sex have a few similarities: they both require a certain level of physical fitness and they can both result in feelings of satisfaction and pleasure, albeit to varying degrees. It makes sense, therefore, that people who exercise on a regular basis also tend to have more fulfilling sex lives.

In fact, a study conducted by the University of British Columbia found that women who did as little as 20 minutes of exercise a day had a significantly greater sexual response than women who did no exercise at all. The *Electronic Journal of Human Sexuality* also reported that people who exercise on a regular basis have higher levels of sexual drive, sexual

Within moderation

Regular exercise can be extremely beneficial for your sex life, but only if you don't overdo it. Excessive exercise or pushing yourself too soon at the start of an exercise routine can be counterproductive, leading to fatigue, soreness and an increased risk of injury.



MOVE IT

Your body is at its peak late in the afternoon or early evening, making it the ideal time to exercise. You breathe easier, your muscles are at their most powerful and your heart works most efficiently.

A swimming good time

A Harvard University study found that people in their 60s who swam on a regular basis had sex lives comparable to people in their 40s.

activity and sexual satisfaction. The reason for this? Regular exercise improves blood circulation, including blood supply to the sexual organs, and promotes heart and lung health, giving you increased stamina in your daily activities as well as in the bedroom. People who engage in regular exercise also tend to be in a healthier weight range and feel more confident about their bodies than those who don't do this.

“Exercise builds self-esteem. The more active you are, the sexier you're going to feel. Anyone who's lost a lot of weight or changed their lifestyle around will tell you they feel they're finally the person they've always wanted to be or haven't been since they were 20. It's such a major boost.”

Losing weight and being happy with the way you look can also help you to relax, leading to greater enjoyment from

sex, says Lourey-Bird. “Having confidence in the way you look, and particularly in the way you look naked, really can do wonders for your sex life,” she says.

INCREASING DESIRE

A healthy and active sex life is not just about your sexual performance. It's also about your feelings towards sex and having a healthy libido. “The benefits of exercise in terms of boosting mood are very well founded and that certainly translates to feeling good in the bedroom,” Lourey-Bird explains. “Exercise releases what we call the ‘feel-good chemicals’ – serotonin, adrenaline, dopamine and endorphins. Serotonin is an important antidepressant hormone and your endorphins are responsible for the common ‘runner's high’. They are also the reason why some people can become addicted to exercise; because they get such a buzz out of it.”

Endorphins are also released at other times of general excitement, when you're in love and, appropriately, during orgasm. “At the end of the day, if you're on a high, you're going to feel a lot more like sex than if you've been stressed out and doing very little physical activity,” says Lourey-Bird.

CREATING INSTANT SELF-ESTEEM

Being sexually attracted to another person is only half the story. Great sex requires you to also feel sexy, adds Dr Morrissey. “If you're feeling good about yourself, then that has a positive effect on how you feel about your relationship and how you feel about your sexual self,” she explains.

Trish's story

“My sex life was virtually non-existent, even though I was in a happy relationship,” admits Trish Jenkins, 37, a stay-at-home mother from Adelaide. “I was overweight – having gradually let myself go from the time I got married – and I wasn't comfortable with my body, which was half the problem. I started going for a 30–40 minute walk every day and using an exercise bike at home. I'd even meet with a girlfriend to play tennis on the weekends.

“It wasn't anything to do with improving my sex life, I was just trying to lose some weight, feel better about myself and get my figure back. But a few months later, my sex life naturally seemed to pick up. I think it was probably a combination of me feeling better about the way I looked, as well as having more energy and inspiration that led to more passion. In hindsight, my fitness, which I've kept up, has been one of the best things I've ever done for my relationship, even though that wasn't what it was all about to start with.”

WORKING OUT FOR MAKING OUT

So, next time you feel like jumping off the treadmill, consider the unexpected benefits of exercise. “To achieve the first stage of sexual response and arousal, you've got to have good blood flow, so a good cardio workout is really important,” advises Dr Morrissey. Running, power walking, cycling or swimming for 30 minutes at a time at least three times a week will help both sexual stamina and circulation.

“You also want to look at muscle tone. Orgasm is a release of muscle tension, so the more toned your muscles are the more intense your orgasms are going to be,” adds Dr Morrissey. Strength training with weights, as well as push-ups and sit-ups, are ideal. “Your muscles – everything from your pelvic floor to major muscle groups – are going to get weaker over time if you don't work them out,” she warns. Kegal exercises, which involve tightening and relaxing the pelvic floor muscle, can be useful to enhance sexual enjoyment. They can help some women achieve orgasm and give men greater ejaculatory control. “Changing your sex life is like starting an exercise program,” says Dr Morrissey. “You want to do it in small, realistic stages. Even a small change is going to feel transformative.” [www](#)