

Sensate Focus Exercises

This handout offers you information on sensate focus exercises. It is important you and your partner read this handout.

Sensate focus exercises use physical touch to help build trust and intimacy in the relationship with your partner. These exercises can help you become more relaxed and comfortable with feelings experienced when giving and receiving pleasure. There is no expectation or pressure to become aroused during these exercises.

Sensate focus exercises are divided into 3 phases. Take your time with each phase before moving to the next phase. Explore your partner's body, taking pleasure in what it feels like. Use different kinds of touch (examples: light touch, massage). Tell your partner what kinds of touch give you pleasure. It's okay to give suggestions too.

Do these exercises for 20 to 60 minutes, 2 to 3 times a week for 6 or more weeks.

Ground rules

You and your partner need to agree on ground rules before starting these exercises. This includes:

- A time and place where you won't be disturbed. Turn off your phone(s) and lock the door.
- A pleasant and comfortable location. This includes making choices for music, lighting and scents/aromas.
- The amount of time to give and receive touch.
- When to move from one phase to the next.

Phase 1: Non-Genital Sensate Focus

The purpose of this phase is to touch and explore non-genital areas of your partner's body. This phase does not involve touching the breasts, vaginal area, penis or testicles. The purpose is not to become aroused or have an orgasm. It is okay if you do. Sexual intercourse and penetration is not allowed during this phase. You can choose to be naked, wear underwear or comfortable clothing. It may be helpful to find a book or video to learn different ways to give a massage. Spend the time you and your partner need in phase 1 before moving to phase 2.

Steps for phase 1

1. Touch your partner's hands, arms, feet, scalp and face.
2. Sit with your partner's head in your lap. Touch their chin, cheeks, forehead, and temples.
3. Touch their ear lobes, lips, nose, forehead and temples.
4. Touch their back, neck, arms, buttocks and legs. Include the hands, feet and face.
5. Touch their chest, stomach, shoulders and thighs. Avoid touching the breasts, tops of legs and the genital area.

Phase 2: Genital Sensate Focus

The purpose of this stage is to increase pleasure and an awareness of your partner's response to different types of stimulation. The purpose is not to become aroused or have an orgasm. It is okay if you do. Sexual intercourse and penetration is not allowed during this phase. Continue to touch parts of the body included in phase 1. Spend the time you and your partner need in phase 2 before moving to phase 3.

Steps for phase 2

1. Touch and explore your partner's breasts and nipples (for both women and men).
2. Touch areas around their genitals. Include touching the testicles for men without trying to cause an erection.
3. Touch their genitals (the vaginal area or penis).
4. Use a 'teasing technique'. Stimulate their genitals. Do this gently at first then increase the speed of stimulation. Stop for a few minutes before starting again. You may want to use a water or silicone based lubricant. Silicone based lubricants cannot be used with sex toys.
5. You may want to add kissing, licking and sucking into the touching of non-genital and genital areas.

Phase 3: Penetrative Sensate Focus

For this phase, you will include penetration, using fingers, sex toys or the penis. Use a water or silicone based lubricant. Continue to touch the parts of your partner's body explored in phases 1 and 2. Orgasm and intercourse is permitted but not the purpose of this phase. The purpose is to enjoy intimacy between you and your partner.

Steps for phase 3

1. Start with gentle penetration using little or no thrusting. Enjoy the feeling. The person being penetrated should be in control of the depth and length of time for penetration.
2. Start with one of you on top before switching positions.
3. Add more thrusting with the person being penetrated in control.
4. It may be helpful to find a book or website showing different sexual positions. This may help you find other comfortable and pleasurable positions.

Talk to a cancer centre social worker if you have questions about Sensate Focus Exercises.

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