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Everyman and Woman's Guide to Great Sex

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Good sex doesn't just fall from the sky, and great sex doesn't get mediocre without help from you. Everything we do, think, eat, feel and remember turns sex either hot or cold. Here are the five best and worst things you can do to your sex life. First the five top sex winners.

1. Anything that gets your oxytocin going. This underappreciated, naturally occurring hormone produces an intense urge to bond in both sexes. That's why some call it the "chemical of commitment," and "hormonal superglue." The best part: oxytocin gets double-blasted into your bloodstream and nervous system in response to real touch or even just the idea of touch. So kisses, back and feet rubs, smiles, kisses, compliments, brushing fingers, even cuddling with your cat gets you in the mood for the kind of touchy-feely love that binds.

2. Moderate amounts of exercise, especially for women experiencing libido or orgasm problems. Too much or not enough exercise has the opposite effect.

3. Chocolate, in your mouth or on your mind. After centuries of hype it's the placebo effect on top of a tiny bit of the natural stimulant PEA from the cocoa plant.

4. Change. The brain's naturally occurring stimulants are activated by new places, tastes, sounds and smells. It's why sex is better when you go on vacation compared to hanging around the house. By trying new things alone and together, you re-excite your stimulating chemicals, and get the reward system of your brain expecting new and ever better pleasures.

5. Don't forget evolution: The drive to reproduce is the best invisible third party for any pair of lovers.

Five Top Love Losers

1. Booze and Drugs: alcohol is far and away the most deceptive of love losers. First it relaxes you but then it can rob you of your ability to sexually perform or even feel very much. Another misconception concerns ecstasy, which like speed (meth) causes 40 percent of men to lose erections.

2. Too little or too much food kills libido.

3. Hardcore, visual pornography for women.

4. Distraction for women. Unlike men who once they've gotten to the last stage of arousal cannot stop, a woman can be distracted (think baby crying, phone ringing) from her orgasm up to and including the second before she comes.

5. High stress around money and work, especially for men who have erection problems when their work lives let them down.

If there's a general caution, it's that whatever feels "too good, too fast" will probably screw up your sexual health. The good news: the brain, every cell in our bodies, our thoughts and emotions can all change. It's the wonder of chemistry.

For more, go to the book I coauthored with evolutionary psychologist Maryanne Fisher, PhD, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Chemistry of Love*.

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