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How Sexual Mindfulness Can Improve a Couple's Sex Life

by Charice West



Mindfulness: The ever-trending life hack. We've all heard of it, but what exactly is it? Mindfulness is the practice of being present in the moment without being self-critical. It involves a combination of techniques such as clearing your mind, being still, being aware of your surroundings and feelings, and more. You can practice mindfulness to decrease stress, to improve physical health, or even to sleep better.¹

While you may be comfortable with the idea that mindfulness helps you mentally and physically, the idea that it could also help you sexually may seem strange at first. Dr. Chelom Leavitt, a sexual mindfulness researcher, said, "It may initially seem a little counter-intuitive, but slowing the experience down, being less goal-oriented and more intentional actually helps people feel better about themselves, closer to their partner, and more satisfied with the sexual experience."²

Dr. Leavitt and a team of researchers recently published a study in the *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*³ looking at how being mindful during sex affects a person's sexual well-being. Specifically, they studied the effects of "sexual mindfulness," or the practice of being attentive and nonjudgmental during sexual encounters. They discovered that sexual mindfulness helps a person feel more satisfied with their relationship, more satisfied with sex, and improves their self-esteem. But how does this work?

These researchers surveyed 194 heterosexual, married adults to find out. They measured sexual mindfulness by asking questions such as "I pay attention to sexual sensations" and "I pay attention to my emotions during sex." Overall, they found that those who rated

themselves as more sexually mindful were less anxious over sex, were more sexually satisfied overall, and were more satisfied with their marriage. Here's how sexual mindfulness can help in each of these areas:

1. **Less Sexual Anxiety.** Sex can be an incredibly powerful bonding moment for a couple, but it can also be stressful. Stress during sex can come from many things, such as feeling anxiety over how one's body looks, being nervous about performing well, or struggling to get aroused. One way to overcome these stresses is to build your self-esteem—and mindfulness is a great self-esteem builder. When practicing sexual mindfulness, you focus on accepting your emotions without judgment during the sexual encounter. According to Leavitt's study, this nonjudgmental attitude decreases negative thoughts towards yourself and your partner, increasing your self-esteem and lessening your sexual anxiety.
2. **Greater Sexual Satisfaction.** This study found that sexual mindfulness benefits genders differently. For women, sexual mindfulness lead to more satisfaction with their sex life. Mindfulness may be especially helpful for women because women tend to focus more on their partner's pleasure rather than their own. Being mindful helps a woman to focus her attention on her own sexual pleasure, which in turn increases her satisfaction with the sexual encounter. For men, being sexually mindful did not show significant improvement in their sexual satisfaction,

although it could help with erectile dysfunctions as the man ages. While this is true, mindfulness can still significantly improve men's self-esteem and relationship satisfaction.

3. **More Relationship Satisfaction.** Sexual mindfulness not only improves sexual satisfaction and self-esteem, but also enhances a couple's overall relationship. Mindfulness encourages individuals to observe their thoughts and actions without immediately reacting, which is a critical skill to have in everyday interactions with your partner. In a heated discussion, for example, we sometimes say harmful things without thinking it through beforehand. If we analyze our feelings and actions calmly, as mindfulness teaches us to do, then we might stop ourselves from saying those words before they slip out. So, being mindful in the bedroom could create a habit of self-control and awareness that continues in daily interactions over divisive issues that may arise.

Sexual mindfulness requires some patience and time, but overall it is a simple and effective way to have better sex. So now that we know how it works, how exactly do we practice it? Although sexual mindfulness is a new research topic and scholars are still working on developing sexual mindfulness techniques, Dr. Leavitt has some tips that have proven effective.

Dr. Leavitt suggests that "the average person can improve their sexual relationship with a little instruction and practice. It doesn't require new positions or special skill. Better sex may be as simple as slowing down;

being less judgmental about yourself and your partner; and paying attention to the touch, arousal, and connection felt during sex.”⁴

Anyone can start practicing mindfulness in their sexual experiences by being less critical and more aware of their thoughts and feelings. You could also try some of Dr. Leavitt’s

specific [mindfulness exercises](#), such as the “mindful embrace.”⁵ This includes hugging your partner with full body contact, staying silent, focusing on your breathing, and showing awareness of your body and your partner’s body.

Charice D. West is an undergraduate student at Brigham Young University studying Family Science and

working with Dr. Chelom Leavitt. She is interested in continuing her education in marriage and family therapy. Currently, Charice works at a treatment center for young girls who are hoping to heal family relationships and has been married to her sweetheart, Ryan, for almost two years. They enjoy folding origami together, adding to their extensive Rubik’s Cube collection, and playing music.

Endnotes

¹ Green, E. (2020, July 13). *Mindfulness exercises to help you sleep*. [No Sleepless Nights](#).

² Dolan, E. C. (2019, March 6). *Study finds mindful people are happier with their sex life*. [PsyPost](#).

³ Leavitt, C. E., Lefkowitz, E. S., & Waterman, E. A. (2019). The role of sexual mindfulness in sexual wellbeing, relational wellbeing, and self-esteem. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 45(6), 497-509. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2019.1572680>

⁴ Dolan, E. C. (2019, March 6). *Study finds mindful people are happier with their sex life*. [PsyPost](#).

⁵ Leavitt, C. E. (2020, May 18). *Creating mindful exercises*. [Chelom Leavitt](#).