



SENSES

THE

5

OF

SEX

SEX IS A TOTAL-BODY EXPERIENCE. IT'S NOT JUST TOUCHING HER, OR LOOKING AT HER, OR HEARING HER MOAN. IT'S ALL OF THAT—AND MORE.

## TOUCH

## Where does pleasure start?

With a glimpse of skin—or the first touch? Maybe it's the sound of her key in your door. Let's not overthink this, and just feel it. "We use our five senses primarily for purposes other than enjoyment," says Justin Sitron, Ph.D., a sexuality researcher at Widener University. "Sex is a chance to use them to just experience your body." And hers. And yours with hers. Employ all five senses, and sex is more than a roll in the sack. It's pure pleasure.

Growing up, everything I knew about sex came from late-night Cinemax: *If he touches me here, I'll react like this*. As if sex were call-and-response—I'd yell "Polo" when I heard "Marco." But when I actually had sex, I found that movie sex left me numb. It took years, and one vacation, to unlearn what I'd subconsciously studied.

One winter in Big Sur, my boyfriend and I rented a one-room cabin with only a queen-size bed. "Let's switch clothing," he suggested after dinner. We undressed. He wrapped my neck with his wool scarf; I handed him my lace underwear. We tormented each other, adding scratchy accessories, until we couldn't stand it. When he uncoiled the scarf, I nearly moaned in relief. Nothing had happened, but I was turned on.

Still, he held back. What I could feel when he wasn't touching me: the hammering of his heart, our tremors of anticipated pleasure. I wished he'd just slam into me, but this wasn't Cinemax.

Gently he laid me on the bed. Skin to skin, my softness against his roughness, he lightly traced my ear with his warm tongue; I trembled. Then he licked inside. He kissed the tender skin on my eyelids, my neck, each rib, the insides of my thighs, cornering the small, neglected zones.

When he finally, urgently pulled my hips toward him, he communicated with a gesture how much he wanted me. And I realized I wasn't too far off with Marco Polo—when we touched, our bodies answered. —*Elissa Bassist*

### YOUR MAGIC TOUCH

Touch is a woman's primary trigger for desire, according to a study in the *Journal of Sex Research*. "With the other senses, you're not necessarily engaged while your partner experiences it," says Sitron. "But touch is reciprocal: You can feel me touching you while I experience touching you."

Take advantage with a sex therapy technique called "sensate focus." Have your partner lie flat on her back with her eyes closed, and slowly caress her

head and face—hair, nose, ears, lips; cover it all. "Pretend this is your last chance to savor her body," says Sitron. Move to her torso and legs and feet, then flip her over and repeat.

The point is to chart new erotic territory. "The genitals, breasts, and inner thighs have the most nerve receptors, so they're most sensitive," says social psychologist Justin Lehmiller, Ph.D. "But almost any body part can become erotic if you learn to associate it with sexual pleasure."

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## SMELL

Here is my secret: When I kiss you, I inhale deeply. I take in your cologne, your mouthwash, and that distinct organic scent that makes you “you.” Scientists believe that women possess a keener sense of smell than men do. I believe them. Because if a guy smells good, my notions of “type” immediately evaporate.

Take Nathan. I met him at a party and thought he was bold and funny but not my flavor. Later, though, when we were alone in his car en route to an afterparty, I detected his cologne. It had notes of cedar, basil, maybe tobacco. I leaned in to smell his skin. It was sweet like coconut milk. Cut to the kind of makeout session that makes an impromptu Vegas wedding seem smart.

During sex, I smell your soapy skin. Your salty-smelling sweat, which makes me want to lick you like the rim of a margarita glass. Then there are the cottony linens (nothing like dirtying up clean sheets), and my own smell, preferably on your face, starchy and sweet, after you go down on me. Later, curled in the nook of your chest and underarm, I relish the musky, earthy smell of sex in the air. Pheromones, maybe.

Then afterward, if the sex was good, I linger over the scent of your cologne on my jacket or pillow—at one time, the black leather notes from a certain bottle were mentally interchangeable with “best sex ever” for me. It became the smell of orgasm. Nothing, though, supersedes the smell of, simply, you. —*Rachel White*

### THE SCENT OF A MAN

Your gym teacher may have convinced you to cover up your natural scent—but it may actually be one of the most powerful tools in your arousal arsenal. “There is some evidence that humans have pheromones,” says Alan Hirsch, M.D., founder of the Smell & Taste Treatment and Research Foundation. “In one study, when a potential male pheromone was placed under chairs, females clumped in that area.”

So sweat together: Exercise activates your

apocrine glands, the site of pheromone release in primates, says Dr. Hirsch. Each woman reacts differently, but his research shows that musk can decrease vaginal bloodflow; women may associate the scent with jerks. Instead, dust your bod in baby powder, which can elevate vaginal bloodflow, or for a first date, wear eucalyptus, camphor, and menthol. (Try J.R. Watkins Menthol Camphor Bath Soak.) “These scents increase empathy,” says Dr. Hirsch.

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## HEARING

I crave noise during lovemaking. Because you know what I hear during silent sex? My cat, pawing at his automatic food dispenser in the other room. My own thoughts, louder and louder and louder, wondering where you are and whether you’re having any fun. And the thwack, thwack, thwack of your balls. It’s not a good head space.

Here’s what is: Duke Ellington, Beach House, or Kanye West in the background, sinking my brain into a very specific groove. Your breath, sucked in between your teeth, when my tongue hits that spot—you know the one. That crisp smack of your palm against my butt. My giggles and gasps. Your rumbling growls. And your words. *Your words.* They spark an electrical firestorm in my brain that stokes my ego, ignites my imagination, and tickles the dirtiest, most primal corners of my mind. Like this:

*Stand with your legs apart.*

*You like that? Let me look at you.*

Whew. You can’t have that effect on me without sound. And neither can you provide me with this: the whimper. The one at the end, when words are impossible, and our ragged gasps mix in chorus, and it escapes from your chest—the signal that I’ve brought you over the edge. There’s power in that vulnerable whimper.

In any case, if you’re not a talker, gasper, ass smacker, or whimperer... there’s always Spotify. Anything, really, beats that thwack, thwack, thwack. —*Carolyn Kylstra*

### SEXUAL SOUND EFFECTS

Your moaning may excite her, but it’s probably not what sends her over the edge. “Sounds cue men in to whether a woman is really enjoying sex, but women can physically see when a man is aroused,” Lehmiller says. What she really craves is communication. In the form of four-letter words.

If whispering explicit nothings doesn’t come naturally, simply tell her what you want during sex, but substitute naughty words for your normal sexual vocab.

(Hint: She prefers “cock” to “dick” and “give head” to “blow job,” a *Journal of Sex Research* study found.) “You don’t want her to feel out of control,” says Sitron. “Start by telling her to do things you already know she’s comfortable with.”

Or let music do the job for you. Explicit lyrics can have the same effect as dirty talk, Sitron says. Turn it into foreplay: Scroll through iTunes and reveal which songs you’ve always wanted to have sex to. Then do it.





He poured the honey over my navel and hip bones, then softly licked and bit my skin. When he kissed me afterward, he tasted sweet.



Styling: Kathy Kalfatut, hair: Boise Cheung/Aveda/Walter Schupler Management, makeup: William Murphy/MAC Cosmetics/Opus Beauty, manicure: Kristina Konarski/Dor Vernis/Prive; Casabella bra and panties

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## SIGHT

Whoever said women aren't visual wasn't a woman. My strongest memories of exes are mildly voyeuristic—there's something compelling about watching a man in his moments of utter unself-consciousness, preferably when he's partially nude. It started in college, when I'd watch my boyfriend cooking, oddly and invariably shirtless. His biceps would flex as he opened the refrigerator door; his back muscles contracted while he chopped onions.

Now it's watching my fiancé doing yard work. I once stood in the driveway as he muscled shovelfuls of mulch, wearing only a pair of faded jeans, and surreptitiously snapped an iPhone pic. A posed shot would have ruined the thrill.

My gaze is discerning, though. If I see an attractive man, I acknowledge his handsomeness. But that's it—there's no mental undressing. The targets of my lustful eye have almost exclusively been men I've loved. That's in part because only an informed eye can detect the subtleties—the L-shaped scar framing his jaw, the faint beginnings of gray hair—that have seduced me.

But perhaps more important, knowing the man makes me feel I'm watching a stranger. I see defined muscles usually blurred by passion. The way his sweet eyes become fierce with concentration. The person I know is there, but he's somehow different. It's not "him and me." It's just him, the man, a reminder of who he was when I first met him. —*Laura Roberson*

### SEDUCTION ON SIGHT

Most women don't want Weiner-style sexts. But not because they think your rod is repulsive; they just want to see all of you. "Men are often turned on by body parts, but most women are turned on by context and people," says Sitron. As neuroscientist J.R. Georgiadis, Ph.D., explains, "When women look at sexual pictures, they look at many things besides genitals—what's on the table, the color of the flowers." It's not that she's more interested

in the centerpiece than your penis: Women just use more visual cues to guide their attraction.

Research suggests that the most resounding cue may, in fact, be your face. Instead of shooting her a junk pic, "send a head shot with a sexy caption," says Lehmiller. But in bed, let her see all the action: Have her lie on her back, knees up, and kneel between her legs. More of your muscles will be visible and activated, says Sitron. Plus, she can watch you penetrate.

# 5

## TASTE

In my early 20s, I was living in New York City and having the most adventurous sex of my life with Dylan, a man 10 years my senior. We loved staying in bed all morning, reading the book *Tasting Him: Oral Sex Stories*. Between stories, I'd go down on him, our oral sex flavored by lip gloss or toothpaste or cherry warming lube. Ultimately, though, we decided that nothing was hotter than honey and sex.

One summer night, Dylan and his buddy met up with my friend Julie and me at a bar. We drank glass after glass of spicy rum. I was wearing a dress with a deep V-neck. Dylan whispered in my ear, "You look so sexy right now. I want both of you to come home with us." The rum made Julie and me feel fearless; we agreed.

I did a lot of exploring that night in Dylan's cramped East Village apartment—I'd never had my mouth on another woman's breast, or gone down on a guy with my boyfriend watching. But most memorable was a scenario Dylan and I had shared dozens of times before: I grabbed the honey off his nightstand. He poured it over my navel and hip bones, then softly licked and bit my skin. When he kissed me afterward, he tasted sweet. My nipples hardened with desire.

Since that night, honey has been my condiment of choice—I add it to my tea and top my toast with it religiously. With each taste, my body tingles with the memories of that sticky and sexy summer night. —*Chloe Caldwell*

### A TASTE OF EXCITEMENT

Katy Perry kissed a girl... and what did she remember? The taste of cherry ChapStick. Women care more than men do about a pleasant-tasting mouth, possibly because their sense of taste is more finely tuned, reports *Evolutionary Psychology*. But Dr. Hirsch says the effect is more Pavlovian than primal: "If a taste reminds you of a successful sexual experience, it will induce arousal." (This may explain why you love how she tastes during oral.)

If she doesn't dig the taste of semen, you probably aren't going to change her mind. So take the more obvious route to gustatory arousal: food. Choose a victual she rarely eats but enjoys—say, chocolate-covered cherries—and feed it to her during foreplay.

"The sex reinforces the pleasure of food, and the pleasure of food reinforces the sex," says Dr. Hirsch. Eventually the food alone may be enough to trigger her arousal. *Bon appétit.* —*L.R.*