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It's OK If You Want Sex Less Than Ever Right Now, but Here's Why Physical Touch Still Matters

Navigating a global pandemic isn't exactly a turn-on for most stressed out parents, but there are a bevy of reasons relationship experts are encouraging couples to continue to find ways to connect physically.

By [Maressa Brown](#) | Updated on April 20, 2020



Facing the threat of a highly contagious virus, stay-at-home orders, and social distancing measures, sex might be the last thing on your mind. You're not alone. "A majority of parents are dealing with low desire and interest due to stress," says [Shanon Chavez, Psy.D.](#), a psychologist and sex therapist in Los Angeles.

Further proof: In a poll of over 10,000 people from [NBC News](#), 49 percent said the outbreak has affected their sex life negatively. Only 23 percent said the coronavirus outbreak had positively affected their sex lives—aka the fatigue and burnout we're all feeling right now isn't exactly making it easy to prioritize intimacy.

But there's never been a better time to find ways to foster your physical

connection with your partner, according to Chavez and other experts.

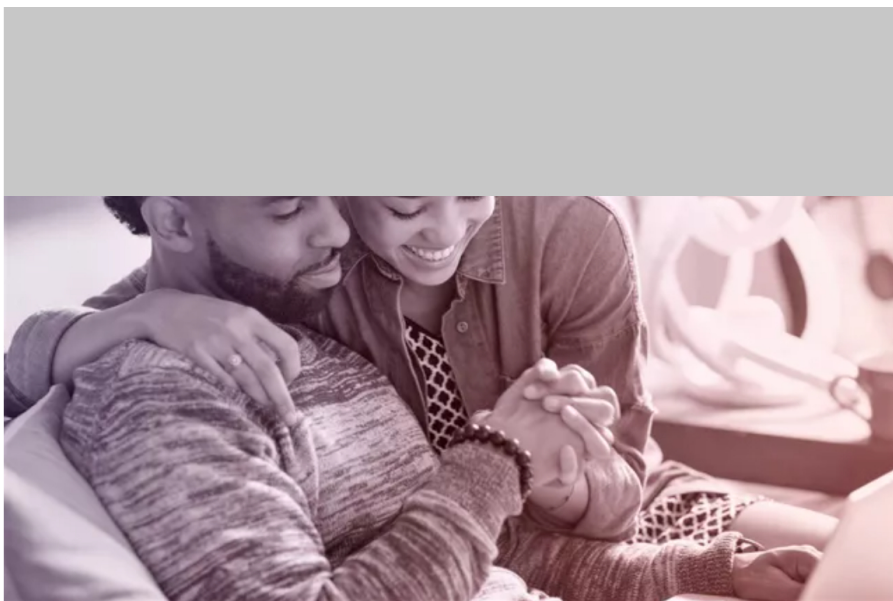


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Why Our Sex Drives Are Down

Sari Cooper, LCSW, AASECT-certified sex therapist, and the director of [Center for Love and Sex](#) in New York City (which is currently offering sex teletherapy and couples counseling on secure platforms) explains that high stress leads to the release of the neurotransmitters epinephrine and norepinephrine, which elevate anxiety, heart rate, and respiratory rate.

"These are the symptoms of what's known as 'fight or flight,'" says Cooper. "The system can become either frozen (think deer in the headlights, or numbed out), more rageful (think more argumentative and easily annoyed), or fleeing." Parents facing continual responsibilities in child care and adhering to social distancing measures are likely to find themselves experiencing the first two expressions, which are not exactly conducive to relaxed intimacy.

We're also dealing with chronically raised levels of cortisol, the stress hormone. "When cortisol is raised for long periods of time, say during a worldwide pandemic, it impacts everything—from digestion, to immune function, and the ability of your brain to process and react to sexual cues," explains [Jordin Wiggins](#), N.D., naturopathic doctor and sexologist.

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The Case for Physical Touch

The good news is that physical touch that lasts just 20 seconds or longer will lead to the release of oxytocin, says Dr. Wiggins. "Oxytocin is the connection hormone, and it makes us feel calm, happy, and increases sexual receptivity," she notes.

Cooper agrees that elevating levels of the hormone through human touch is the fast track to reducing your body's fight or flight responses and bolster a sense of calm. "I always remind parents that the first thing they did when their child was born was hold them," she notes. "Skin-to-skin contact has been shown in innumerable studies to lower the stress hormones released in NICU babies."

Low-Lift Ways to Boost Your Connection

1. Commit to daily connection with your partner with no expectations.

"Start with non-demand touch that includes hand-holding, hugging until you are relaxed, and snuggling," advises Chavez.

Focusing on these lower-pressure forms of sensual touch over sexual touch can be a mindful practice, evoking pleasurable sensations that feel relaxing and soothing, says Chavez. Try to keep sexual touch on the back burner until you've built consistent habits around giving and receiving touch that is mutually pleasurable.

2. Have fun.

Set the stage for more physical contact by striving to laugh together and share positive stories daily, recommends Chavez. She also advises making eye contact when talking and touching your partner, as it can activate the emotional center of the brain and relax the body.

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3. Support each other in daily activities.

"Helping with chores, picking up around the house, and getting the little things done can help reduce stress around intimacy," notes Chavez. Both partners pitching in on what she refers to as "chore-play" can help you feel more present and engaged for sensual or sexual play.

4. Try hand-on-heart eye gazing.

Cooper likes Tantra exercises, such as one that requires partners to sit cross-legged close to one another on the floor facing each other and placing their hand on the other's heart. "Gazing at the other's eyes while getting in touch with one's own breath and your partner's breath encourages both of you to feel your partner's heartbeat which soothes us, begin to slow and deepen your breathing," she says. Partners can "connect emotionally through the eyes and let go of defenses used to get through your day and become more vulnerable ... and hopefully less focused on intrusive worries."

5. Play this quick communication "game."

Kristine D'Angelo, clinical sexologist and certified sex coach in Portland, Oregon, recommends taking turns with your partner asking these two questions: "How do you want me to touch you for three minutes?" and "How do you want to touch me for three minutes?"

The game has two rounds for each partner, taking just 12 minutes to play. But it "brings connection, intimacy, touch, communication, and initiation into a very short time period," she explains.

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6. Devote just 20 minutes a day to connecting.

"Twenty minutes a day is enough time to connect, feel supported, and regain a sense of safety with your partner," explains D'Angelo. "The key is to both agree to prioritize this daily connection to really start to feel the effects of it in your relationship."

Whatever you opt to do, the key is to counterbalance chronic tension with pleasure, says Wiggins. That's what will turn off your body's stress response and allow the body to rest and reset, bolstering your physical and emotional wellness.

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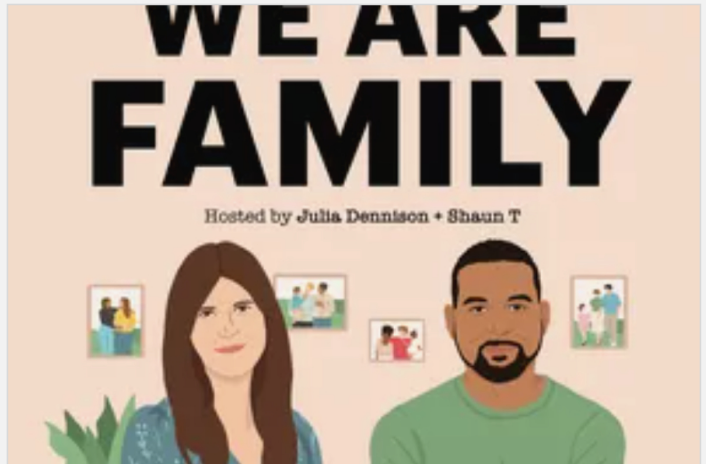
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