

How to have just-met sex

Miss that erotic charge you had when your love was brand-new? Reboot in the bedroom with these tips for turning up the heat on your old flame. **By Jennifer Benjamin**

Long-term love brings all sorts of advantages: a shared history with the guy you love most, a partner who you know will always have your back, and a warm, satisfying sexual connection that can only come from years of intimacy. Still, as great as it is to know each other so well in bed, how could you not miss that crackle and spark you had when you and he first started having sex? Thing is, it doesn't take a lot of work to recapture that "just-met" excitement. Step back, reminisce, enjoy security *and* butterflies—and congratulate yourselves on really, truly having it all.

Create a little distance

Best friends, partners, soul mates—it's what many couples strive to be. But while that kind of emotional melding

feels warm and secure, it's not always sexy. "The very things that love thrives on—familiarity, stability, and security—can kill passion and lust in a relationship," explains couples therapist Esther Perel, Ph.D., author of *Mating in Captivity*. "For desire to thrive, you need to maintain some of the elusiveness and independence you had when you were first together—if you're too available to your partner, too open with each other, you lose that edge."

That's why, for the sake of your sex life, it's a good idea to make some space. "A little bit of distance and separation, both physical and emotional, can actually fuel sexual excitement because it sets up a thrill-of-the-chase kind of dynamic, similar to what you had when you were first dating," says Los Angeles-based sex coach



Patti Britton, Ph.D., co-author of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Sensual Massage*. "When you perceive a gap between you and your partner, you subconsciously feel challenged. And that perceived 'obstacle' can actually increase your desire for each other."

Maryanne, 31, an educator in Phoenix, travels a lot for work, as does her husband. While the time apart can be tough, they find that it winds up doing great things for their sex life. "After being gone for a while, it's like we can't get enough of each other," Maryanne says. "It really builds up the anticipation, so when we are together again, it's exciting and steamy and new." No business trip required: A regular girls' night out (and guys' night for him), a weekend away with your girlfriends every so often—all can create the kind of space you need to recharge those naughty feelings.

Another benefit of time apart is that it allows you to make a life for yourself outside of your relationship. "It's important to have an identity as an individual, to be involved in activities that take you away from the home and each other and give you something of your own," says Sharna L. Striar, Ph.D., a certified sex therapist and relationship counselor in private practice in New York City. Try revisiting some of the activities and personal passions you used to pursue before you two started dating but maybe haven't had time for since. It could be yoga, running, photography, or even just Thursday happy hours with friends. By feeding your soul this way, Striar adds, "you're likely to discover a few new things about yourself—things that

Rediscover each other

It doesn't take a genius to figure out that sex with a new partner is thrilling largely because it's, well, *new*. "What makes just-met sex so exciting is that sense of the unknown and the anticipation of what might happen," says Georgia-based sex therapist Gloria Brame, Ph.D. "You're still discovering each other's bodies, finding new ways to turn each other on, and testing new waters." So in order to recapture that just-met sizzle, you have to snap out of the same-old sex routine.

A classic way to reboot your sexual relationship is to go away together—for a week, a few days, even just a night. Or send the kids on a sleepover and turn off the phones so you can have total alone time in your own home. "Call it a sex vacation," says Britton. "It's an opportunity to go back to the beginning, when you didn't have babies, shared bills, or a mortgage, and your relationship was just about the two of you, having fun."

Even if you can't get away, taking a trip down memory lane can bring back some of that new-relationship excitement. Consider reenacting your first meeting or date, maybe even returning to the scene of the crime. "Reliving that first introduction can give you both emotional and sexual recall," says Brame. "It can transport you to that moment—those butterfly feelings, the sexual buzz." And the sense that you're "strangers" can make the encounter feel illicit and naughty as well.

Take it a step further by tapping into some of your first sexual experiences

ies, making them new again. One suggestion: Blindfold yourselves and take turns lightly kissing each other's bodies or stroking your partner's skin with your fingertips. You may be surprised by how much you might have been missing all this time.

Shock your system

Ah, the first flush of new love. The permanent smile plastered on your face, that tingling below the belt, the goose bumps you got when he touched you. Thank you, hormones! "The novelty and excitement of a new sexual partner triggers the production of dopamine and norepinephrine, neurotransmitters that are responsible for that love high," explains Helen Fisher, Ph.D., a professor of anthropology at Rutgers University and author of *Why We Love*. "They also boost testosterone in your system, increasing your sex drive." As the newness wears off, though, all of those chemicals start to decline, making you less amped up romantically and sexually.

Here's the good news: You can actually trick your hormones into giving you that new-love glow again. Any kind of adrenaline-boosting activity, in the bedroom or out, drives up dopamine levels in the brain, bringing back some of that same heady excitement you had when you first met, says Fisher. So try something daring together, whether it's mountain biking, kickboxing, dancing, even seeing a thriller or horror movie. A high-octane endeavor is in itself an aphrodisiac, and it can help you rekindle some of that nervous excitement and stomach flip-flopping that you may have felt on your first few dates together.

Doing daring things in bed is another way to plug into that fear factor. Consider exploring something unexpected and a little scary for you sexually, whether it's hanging out around the house naked, getting into doggy-style position with the lights on, or being more vocal during sex. "Stepping out of your comfort zone will give you a rush of *I can't believe I'm doing this*, which can be equally as adrenaline-boosting as rock climbing," says Brame.

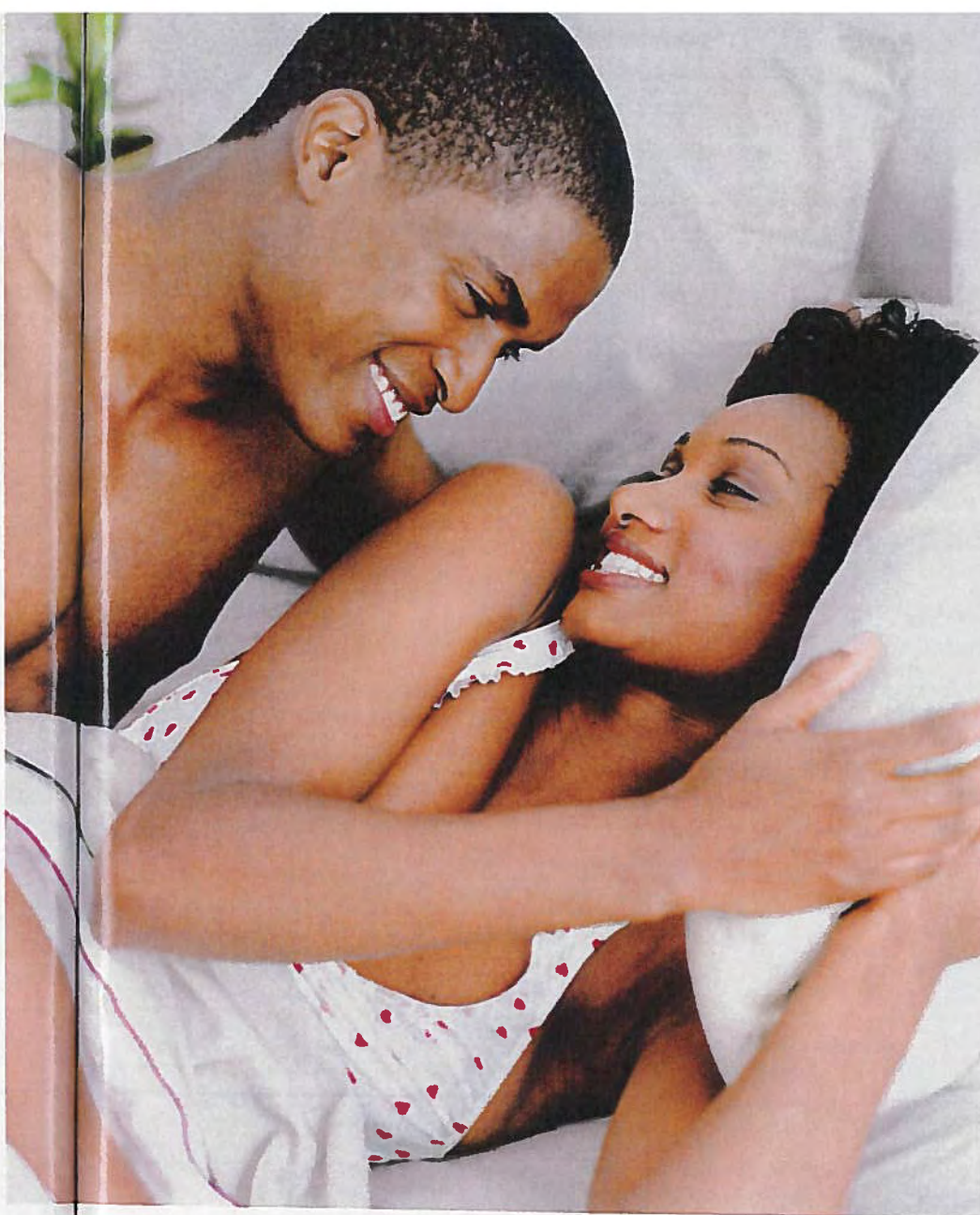
Another way to fire up that tear-each-other's-clothes-off desire: Put some feeling into it. "The reason make-up sex is often so intense is that anger and tension are sexually energizing emotions—they

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your partner can then discover as well."

It's also okay—even good—to keep some corners of your life and mind all to yourself. "Many couples feel like the only way to bond is by sharing everything with each other," says Perel. "But it's mystery that really fuels desire and draws your partner to you. You might think that if you've been together for years, it's impossible, but the mystery is always there, if you allow it."

with each other. "Think about what turned you on then and use that in your sex life now," Brame adds. Was it his smell? Having sex in the middle of the day? Showering together? Getting it on in the car? Although you may have been there, done that five years ago, re-creating those same naughty encounters will bring you back to the beginning. And focus on sexual activities that help you rediscover each other's bod-



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spark desire and excitement,” says Britton. Just ask Anna, 41, a therapist in Oakland, CA: “My husband and I like to play fight. We’ll spank each other, we’ll wrestle, I’ll teasingly pin him down during sex. After being together for eight years, we don’t have as many emotional highs and lows, so getting aggressive, even in a playful way, brings some excitement to the surface. We get a rush from it, like a flashback to the fun, passionate intensity we felt when we first started dating.”

Tune in to your sexy side

When was the last time you did something purely for the sake of feeling sexy? “When you’re dating, your appearance and sexual self-confidence are often a priority,” says Britton. “But once you’re married and

have other things going on in your life, you don’t always put as much focus into your sexuality.” Think back to the times in your life when you’ve felt your sexiest—including when you and your guy first met. What did you wear? How did you walk, talk, act? What music did you like? What food did you crave? What did you do to pamper yourself? Can you re-create any of those sensations now?

Once you’ve connected with your sexiest self, think about how you used to express that sensuality with your guy and try those moves now—whether that means wearing low-cut tops, running your hand over his forearm, or giving him a sweet smile. When you let your inner sexiness shine out, he can’t help but respond to that energy. “Forget that you’ve been to-

gether for years and get back to that place you were at in the beginning,” says Striar. “You’re stepping outside of the wife/mother role you’re used to and tapping into that flirty, more sexually focused version of yourself that you both remember from your early days.”

Take sex off the table

Maybe you had a three-date rule or a one-month rule, or maybe you waited until you were committed or married. In any event, when you first got together, sex wasn’t necessarily assumed. As a result, you probably spent a lot of time exploring all of the other ways to have fun without intercourse. And because that was *all* you were doing, it made the kissing and groping and fondling that much hotter. You can get back that urgency by instituting a temporary sex ban for a week, two weeks, a month—whatever feels like a long wait to you.

Of course, you’ll have to get your partner on board. “Tell him that you want to have fun with all that making out and foreplay you did so much of back in the day. But, in order to do so, you have to take oral sex and intercourse off the table for a little while,” says Brame. “Explain that the act of not having sex will make the sex even more intense and passionate when you finally do have it again.” Plus, you’ll be finding creative new ways to please each other. You can heighten the sexual anticipation by sending each other saucy emails or text messages, or talking about all the things you can’t wait to do once the sex ban is lifted.

“My husband and I have a great sex life, but recently, I felt like we weren’t spending enough time on foreplay,” says Sloane, 33, a human resources manager from Boston. “So I told him I wanted to bring back the whole idea of having make-out sessions—just lying on the couch or in bed, kissing and touching each other, but without it leading to actual sex. At first he kind of balked, but once we started trying it, we both remembered how hot it was to tease each other like that.” Not only does holding back actually increase your desire for sex, but it also re-creates those early days of your sexual relationship—when all you two could think about was finally, *finally* getting each other into bed. **R**