

Sensate Focus

For couples after cancer treatment, Sensate Focus is particularly useful in “taking the pressure off” the couple as they adapt. This is done by engaging the couple in a set of exercises designed to increase communication, physical pleasure, and closeness.

Sensate focus involves three phases. It is important that you take your time on each phase. You should feel comfortable and natural with one phase before moving to the next phase. Sessions usually last 20 to 60 minutes. Move on to later phases as erectile functioning returns.

Before you begin, it is important to create the right environment. To set the right environment, try the following:

- Choose a time and place that works for both of you
- Dim the lights and play soft music you both enjoy
- Use candles and incense
- Turn off your phones
- Use lots of pillows and a comforter
- Decide who will be the first to give pleasure
- Decide if you and your partner will be wearing clothes. You can consider wearing underwear or loose-fitting clothing if it makes you feel more comfortable
- Use baby oils, scented oils, lotions, or powder
- Talk to each other. Tell each other what you want and what you feel comfortable doing
- Give each other feedback on feels good
- Spend equal time on each other during each exercise

Phase 1: Non-genital Sensate Focus Ground Rules

- a) Take time to explore each other’s body. In this first phase, focus on touching parts of the body normally visible. This includes the hands, arms, feet, and face.
- b) Begin with facial caressing. Gently caress the chin, cheeks, forehead, and temples (sides of the forehead). Then touch the ear lobes, lips, and the nose. Gently massage the temples to relax your partner.
- c) Ask your partner to lie on their stomach. Massage their back, neck, arms, buttocks and legs.
- d) Ask your partner to lie on their back. Gently caress their chest, stomach, shoulders and thighs. Avoid touching the breasts and groin area.
- e) You may also want to use massage oils or lotions while massaging your partner.
- f) Once you have finished massaging your partner, your partner will now massage you. Repeat the steps above.

Important Note: here are some things to keep in mind in phase 1:

- Pay attention to things that your partner likes. For example, if touching your partner a certain way gives them pleasure, do it again.
- Tell your partner what you like. This can be done in different ways:
 - Make noises if you like what they are doing.
 - Move their hand to where you want to be touched.
 - Talk about what you like.
- Encourage each other. Instead of saying “don’t...”, tell your partner “it feels better when you...”
- Try something new. If there is something you would like to try, suggest it to your partner.
- In this phase, avoid touching areas such as breasts, nipples, vulva, clitoris or vagina, penis or testicles.
- Try different types of massage. Look for a book or DVD about massage if you want to learn different techniques.

Phase 2: Genital Sensate Focus Ground Rules

- a) During this phase, continue to pay attention to how each of you responds to different types of stimulation
- b) Begin by touching areas that give lots of pleasure. This includes touching the breasts and nipples. Remember, men have nipples too.
- c) Gently massage the areas around the genitals. This includes touching the testicles.
- d) Touch the genitals.
 - On a woman, this includes touching the labia, clitoris and entrance to the vagina
 - On a man, this includes touching the penis, shaft and glans
- e) In this phase, you may also want to include kissing, licking and sucking.
- f) Try teasing your partner. Gently arouse your partner’s genitals, and then increase the speed of stimulation. Take a break for a few minutes. Continue playing with your partner’s genitals again. Pay attention to how your partner responds to having their genitals stimulated at different speeds.

Important Note: here are some things to consider for phase 2:

- Take your time. Spend as much time as you need in this phase before you move onto phase 3.
- Remember to pay attention to the parts of the body that you explored in phase 1
- It may be useful to use lubricants for the genital area
- Avoid sexual intercourse and penetration during this phase
- Orgasm may happen during this phase.

Phase 3: Penetrative Sensate Focus Ground Rules

- a) Continue to pay attention to the parts of the body that you explored in the previous sessions
- b) In this phase, include penetration. Penetration can be done using fingers, toys, or the penis. Penetration may only include fingers and toys as erectile function slowly returns. Penile penetration may not happen until you are confident in erectile function.
- c) Enjoy the feeling of penetration. Begin gentle penetration with little or no thrusting. As you feel comfortable in phase 3, you can slowly increase the amount of thrusting. Tell your partner what feels good.
- d) Take turns being on top.

Important Note: here are some things to consider for phase 3:

- Try different sexual positions. It may be helpful to read books that talk about different sexual positions.
- Orgasm and intercourse may happen in this phase. The goal of this phase is to experience the pleasure and intimacy of touch with sexual activity. Sensate focus is a good way to engage in sexual activity that does not depend on penetrative sex.

Sensate Focus is also useful in helping you and your partner communicate about what feels good.