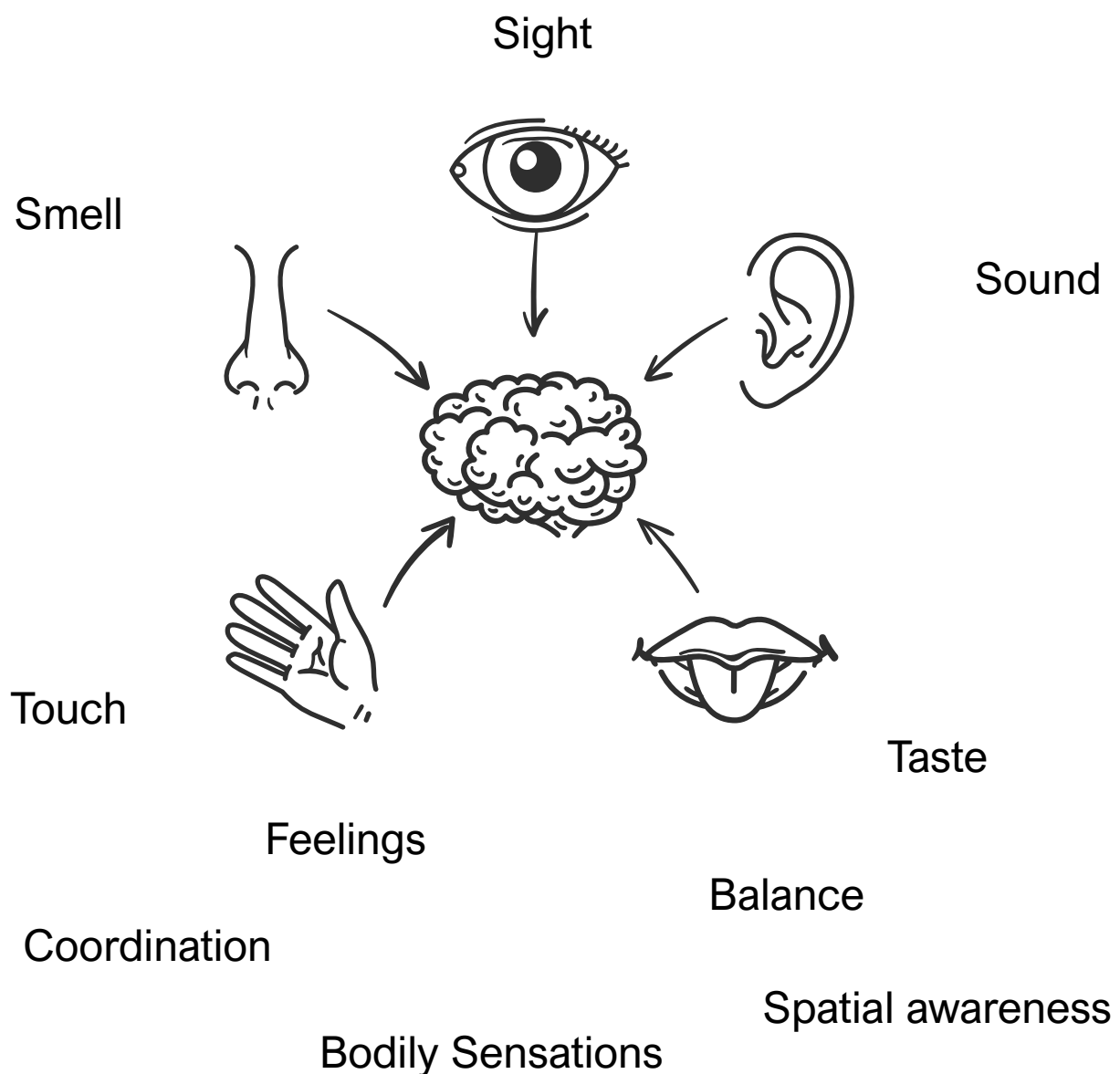


Sensory Aspects of Sexual Intimacy

Julie Marshall (2026)

Being sexually intimate with your partner(s) involves a whole range of sensory aspects. Multiple and conflicting sensory systems are at play, including touch, sight, sound, taste, smell, as well as body awareness, spatial awareness, and awareness of internal body states and sensations.



Sexual intimacy can evoke a wide range of sensory experiences; some sensations may be challenging, some may bring about sensory joy, and some sensations may cause sensory distress. Think about what you like and don't like during sexual intimacy. What about your partner(s)? What are their preferences?



Joy



For people in sexually intimate relationships, it can be difficult to navigate sexual and sensory differences, especially across neurotypes. Everyone experiences sexual intimacy through their own unique lens. All are valid; it's just how you navigate these differences with your partner(s). For instance, some people may seek out a range of sensations or enjoy a particular type of touch. Some people prefer novelty and rituals, and this can bring a sense of safety and predictability

Consider the environment for all parties involved, including lighting, distractions, and scents, as this can help reduce sensory overload or heighten sensory aspects.



Communication is key, so get talking to your partner(s) and/or talk to a psychosexual therapist, as this can enhance greater body and sensory awareness.

Having a shared understanding of sensory likes and dislikes will contribute to a better understanding of your and your partner(s) 'sensory thresholds, including boundaries and desires. This, in turn, can contribute towards enriching your sex life and promoting equitable sexual satisfaction.

Discussions should always be done sensitively and with kindness. **Remember, just because something is a sensory preference doesn't mean a partner has to do this.**

And finally, make sure **CONSENT IS ACTIVE** and **stays ACTIVE THROUGHOUT.**



Take a look at the lists on pages 6 and 7.

Are there any activities that you like or dislike?

Notice what brings you sensory joy, sensory distress, or challenge.

These prompts can be a great way to discuss your wants and needs with your partner(s). Whatever you write down, be mindful that there might be parts of a sexual activity that you like or dislike, or all of it, but are worth discussing with your partner(s) and/or psychosexual therapist.

The lists are not exhaustive, so feel free to add your own.

I have added a communication list on page 8, which includes things that you might feel comfortable saying before, during, or after sexual intimacy.

You decide, but these are just a few suggestions. You can add your own ideas to the list.

There is also a list of feelings and sensations on pages 9-10 and a wheel of emotions on page 11, which can help some people identify how they are feeling.

Sexual Intimacy

Which activities do you like, dislike or find challenging? Which activities bring you sensory joy or sensory distress, or are challenging?

Single lip kiss	Wet kiss	Dry kiss	Hand kiss
Prolonged kiss	Kissing with biting	Nibble kiss	Body kiss
Wrist kiss	Neck kiss	Jawline kiss	Peck kiss
Shoulder kiss	French kiss	Cheek kiss	Holding hands – gently/firm/no
Cuddling	Spooning	Nipple play	Nipple licking
Nipple touch	Slapping	Scented candles	Aftershave
Perfume	Body sprays	Condoms	Dental dams
BDSM	Kink	Music	Lighting
External noises – cat, dog, phones,etc	Not enough physical pressure	Watching porn	Groaning
Moaning	Being naked	Clean-shaven face	Clean-shaven genitals
Pubic hair	Blood – periods	Dirty talk	TV on/off
Grinding	Oral sex	69	Biting
Massage	Body stroking	Body touch	Back rubs
Playing with your hair	Talking during sex	Not enough talking during sex	Nose kiss
Forehead kiss	Underwear	Too much physical pressure	Being told....(fill in)
Being dominated	Submissive	Hair pulling	Lorals (latex underwear)
Nibbling	Sex toys	Distractions	Types of touch – soft, gentle, firm
Types of clothing	Textures (like/dislike)	Smells – what type?	Wetness
Dryness	Semen	Smegma	Penis touch
Vulval touch	Labia touch	Finger penetration	Clitoral touch

Clitoral stimulation	Double penetration (finger and penis)	Eye contact	Gazing
Touch - lingering	Taste (what type?)	Smells (what type?)	Too much pressure
Too many sensory inputs (name them)	Temperature (too hot/too cold)	Certain fabrics (like/dislike)	Stickiness
Lighting	Cluttered environment	Flavours	Tastes
Saliva	Natural body odour	Laundry detergents	Lotions
Body sprays	Hairspray	Hair gels	Hugging
Licking	Blankets	Bedding	Fan
Heater	Lipstick – taste, smell	Lip gloss – taste, smell	Internal condom
Lube	Lubricated condoms	Non-lubricated condoms	Touch I can see
Noises from partner/s	Loud noises from partner/s	Pleasure noises from partner/s	Breath mints
Toothpaste	Chewing gum	Cigarettes	Cigars
Vapes	Alcohol	Body odour – sweat	Scented wipes
Scented tissues	Head position	Sexual positions	Movements
Sudden movements	Same position	Stationary	Body awareness
Body positioning	Genital positioning	Recognising emotional cues	Recognising what you or your partner/s want
Recognising non-verbal cues	Visual cues	Clear language	Space
Set boundaries	Clear communication		

Communication

Things that might be helpful to say before, during and/or after sex.
Examples: I prefer it when you do it more slowly, or I like firm touch.

I am more connected when....	I love it when you.....	Let's be curious	Maybe later when I am.....
Yes	No	Not now	That too firm
A little gentler, please	A little firmer, please	I am overwhelmed right now	That is painful
Sensory overload - bright lights, touch, noises	Sensory seeking - weight, textures, tactile items	Too fast	Too slow
I am sore	It is too wet	It is too dry	It is too noisy
It is too quiet	I am flooded with emotions right now	No	Yes
Faster	Slower	I prefer planned sex	I do not like shocks
I do not like surprises	I like/love surprises. Surprise me	I prefer little eye contact	I like lots of eye contact
I can feel tightness in my body	I feel a flutter in my body	I am too hot	I am too cold
I am tired	My head is too full	Don't stop	This feels so good
This does not feel right	I can say no at anytime	Please stop	Please carry on
Let's take a breather	It felt amazing when.....	Would you like me to.....	Is that the right pace for you?
Would you like me to go faster?	Would you like me to go slower?	I am not really enjoying this right now.	How does that feel?
I find it really hot when...	That's really not my thing	I am so into this	Let's cuddle
Let's kiss	Would you like to do something else?	Let's go slowly	Please do not feel pressured into something you do not want to do
I really enjoyed it when..	I feel loved when.....	I am not sure, let me think about it	I need a break right now
Touch is too much right now	Please stop	Would you like me to carry on	I feel you are not listening to me

Feelings and sensations

Excited	Overwhelmed	On burnout	Shutting down
Distracted	Tired	Busy	Flooded
Adored	Overstimulated	Understimulated	Desired
Sensory overload – bright lights, touch, noises	Sensory seeking – weight, textures, tactile items	Embarrassed	Safe
Sad	Connected	Dirty	Ashamed
Respected	Disrespected	Rushed	Anxious
Nervous	Confident	Violated	Content
Powerful	Curious	Inquisitive	Worried
Exposed	Aroused	Sensitive	Happy
Ambivalent	Confused	Vulnerable	Assertive
Subdued	Eager	Energetic	Relaxed
Annoyed	Frustrated	Connected	Disconnected
Uncomfortable	Fuzzy	Bubbly	Moist
Tingly	Churning	Knotted	Sore
Wobbly	Energised	Shivery	Shaky
Itchy	Sweaty	Fizzy	Tense
Relaxed	Stiff	Floppy	Empty
Nothing	Full (in head)	Hot	Cold
Achy	Numb	Tender	Sensitive
Dull	Sharp	Uncomfortable	Painful

Feelings and sensations

Examples: I am overwhelmed, I am shutting down, I am excited.
You can use the list below and/or the wheel of emotions on page 6.

Pleasant	Prickly	Throbbing	Clammy
Tense	Spacey	Breathless	Anxious
Calm	Nauseous	Trembly	Queasy
Fluttery	Tight	Constricted	Warm
Cozy	Describe your feelings and sensations in your own words	Describe your feelings and/or sensations through colours or shapes	Describe your feelings and/or sensations through a metaphor or story
Describe what is happening for you right now	Describe what happened in the moment		

Wheel of Emotions

Source: Willcox, G. (1982). The Feeling Wheel: A tool for expanding awareness of emotions and increasing spontaneity and intimacy. *Transactional Analysis Journal*, 12(4), 274–276. <https://doi.org/10.1177/036215378201200411>.

