



GET sexy

How to feel your sexual best, from your 20s to your 50s and beyond. by JANE FIELD

The impression is that everyone's having great sex, feeling confident and at one with their body. The reality, however, is very different. Women of all ages constantly grapple with sexual insecurities, be it the size of their breasts or their skills in bed. We speak to the experts about how to feel sexually secure, no matter what your age.

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hether you're in your 20s and shy about your body, or in your 50s and hitting menopause, being sexually secure is not always easy. But sexual confidence brings a sense of attitude in the world; you tend to feel more confident about asking for what you want in your relationship.

Cape Town-based sexologist Dr Eve reveals that having sexual confidence infuses your life with power. Her Pillowbook Sensual Lifestyle Women's Group brings together women with different sexual difficulties in a seven-week group process to overcome sexual obstacles, and gain sexual knowledge and confidence.

The transformation can be profound: from getting a tattoo or changing hair colour to deciding to leave a partner. This, says Dr Eve, is indicative of the power a woman can gain when she gives attention to her sexuality and sexual relationships. "It gives them permission to change their jobs or lose friends whom they hate."

Feeling your sexual best may not be a given, but there are ways to help you get there.

In your 20s

THE SEXOLOGIST: If you haven't yet begun to explore yourself, you will be at a sexual disadvantage and may be ill-equipped to know about orgasms, warns Dr Eve. She adds that you are at an age when you're less assertive; you tend not to want to ask for what you want, and set aside your own needs.

There's often a low level of sexual desire from the mid-20s to mid-30s because you may have yet to experience a satisfying sexual partner. Outside factors are at play, and alcohol and partying may skew the experience.

Research shows that a woman who masturbates tends to be more sexually assertive with her partner. Dr Eve recommends that you educate yourself about masturbation. "Throw away the critical parent voice in your head. Learn to look at your genitals, masturbate, fantasise, and get comfortable in your own body."

THE PSYCHOLOGIST: Dr Marelize Swart recommends the following tips:

- Increase your sexual knowledge through reading (knowledge is power). For women, emotional intimacy with your partner is also crucial. Sex does not necessarily mean intercourse – it could mean sharing feelings and being affectionate.

IMAGE: DEKOFENAK/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

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- Practise, practise, practise (makes perfect). Sexual behaviour does not come naturally. Sex is a skill, and can be learned and practised.
- Experimentation and communication enhance sexual satisfaction. Couples who use oral-genital pleasuring techniques report higher levels of satisfaction. Research shows that self-pleasuring is one of the best ways for women to learn about their natural sexual responses.
- Having an open mind is very important. The broader the intimate sensual and erotic repertoire, the easier it is to maintain sexual desire and avoid the pitfalls of sexual boredom.
- Be prepared to experiment, such as role-play, talk dirty, light candles, wear lingerie or underwear that accentuates your positives, use body oils, try out some sex toys, play sensual music, put on an erotic video.

THE MEDICAL VIEW: Dr Chetan Patel, a plastic and reconstructive surgeon, adds that often women in their 20s decide that this is the time for a breast augmentation. This is also the time when a young woman may decide that a good diet, plenty of exercise and finding happiness in what she chooses to do can be beneficial in helping to feel confident about herself and her body.

In your 30s

THE SEXOLOGIST: Feeling your sexual best in your 30s is “massively challenging”, says Dr Eve. This is the time when your lifestyle changes dramatically. You are trying to balance marriage, kids and work. You are exhausted, your libido may be “dumbed down” and an affair may offer some sort of allure.

“Cheating may boost your confidence, but don’t,” says Dr Eve. “It may make you feel alive, and it could be sexually satisfying, but it will add enormous burden to your relationship and lifestyle.”

This is the time when you want to put a strategy in place. First aim to have a relationship with yourself, and then with your partner. Dr Eve recommends that you have a date night, and learn to parent your children in such a way that still allows you to be intimate and sexual with your partner.

THE PSYCHOLOGIST: Dr Swart recommends the following tips:

- “Use it or lose it.” Research shows that the less women have sex, the less they are interested in having sex, whereas with men, the opposite is true.
- You need to shift your perspective from seeing sex as a source of tension and stress, to seeing sex as a positive and integral part of your relationship.
- Try to follow the 10-minute rule. Give yourself 10 minutes to get into the mood and you might be surprised to see the similarities between sex and physical exercise. Stick around and get more into it.
- Prioritise your sexual relationship by scheduling sex. Research proves couples who schedule sex have more sex that is mutually satisfying.
- Don’t allow fatigue to be an acceptable reason for continuously declining making love. We often do other things when we feel exhausted, like going to dinner with friends, and giving love and attention to our children.
- Don’t let your career or housework or childcare continue to take precedence over your sex life. If you have children, get them to bed earlier. While one spouse cleans up after dinner, let the one who is more tired take a bath or relax.
- Don’t have sex only at the end of the night just before you turn off the lights, as you

may end up choosing sleep over sex on a regular basis.

- Be creative in finding good times for sex: maybe have a sex date, have sex while the kids are napping, or send them to a friend’s house and stay home and make love.
- Couples need to put sex back on the priority list and try things that can rekindle the spark.

THE MEDICAL VIEW: Dr Patel adds that the basics are important, so first eat healthily, ensure that you are sleeping enough and exercise more. And then, he adds, you can consider some non-surgical rejuvenation procedures, such as Botox and fillers. Cosmeceuticals and skincare regimens may also help you feel aesthetically your best.

Dr Anushka Reddy, an aesthetic physician specialising in non-invasive treatments, says aesthetic medical treatment can improve sexual confidence, because if you look good, you feel good about yourself. Most of her clients are in their mid-30s and upwards.

Reddy adds that, at this stage, facial characteristics such as full lips, high cheekbones and wide-open eyes are important parameters for sexual confidence.

A study published in *The British Journal of Urology* found that women in their 30s have a high sex drive, but 43% of those surveyed aged 31 to 45 experienced difficulties in achieving an orgasm. The research concluded that love-making depends on a range of factors, including self-confidence and the strength of the relationship between partners.

In your 40s

THE SEXOLOGIST: How to feel your sexual best in your 30s and 40s will depend on where you are at your stage of life. You may have decided to have your children later; your children may be teenagers; you may be settling into a long-term relationship, or looking to leave one. Sexuality is most powerful for a woman at this stage, says Dr Eve. “You come into your own as a sexual person.”

Ways of enhancing your sexuality when you’re 40-something include focusing on developing your own self. “Be confident to ask for the sex you want, and don’t forget about your toys. At this stage your budget allows more good-quality toys.”

THE PSYCHOLOGIST: Dr Swart explains that what will work for a 30-year-old also applies to those in their 40s. It is all about reconnecting with each other, making time for each other and making time to be intimate.

THE MEDICAL VIEW: Dr Patel says problems for women now are their changing shape and skin texture, which means now could be the time to consider surgical options. Many women have had children and looked after families or pursued exhausting careers, and want a lift, figuratively and literally. Breast augmentations, lifts and reductions are commonplace.

Mommy makeovers (breast-lift and tummy-tuck with liposuction and possibly rejuvenating labial surgery) can help women feel more confident.

In your 50s

THE SEXOLOGIST: This is the time, whether you like it or not, when you are facing perimenopause. And with this comes the massive adjustment to lack of arousal, lack of oestrogen and general malaise. “However, this is a sexually positive time because there is so much you can do,” says Dr Eve.

At this age, a woman can consult with a gynaecologist to become hormonally replete (or not), and vaginally replenished. “You can bring greater lubrication with a whole range of moisturisers and oestrogen cream to replenish your vagina.”

Dr Eve adds that there are great things for clitoral stimulation, having recently imported a moisturiser from the US for clitoral enhancement. By 50, if you’re still married, a sexual relationship can be beset by boredom and routine. “Consider exploring porn; pay particular attention to him, as he’s at the age of potential erectile dysfunction. It’s about working on your relationship as a sexual couple.”

THE PSYCHOLOGIST: Dr Swart offers these tips for mature adults:

- Seek medical professionals who have positive attitudes about sex and sexuality. If they don’t, seek a second opinion.
- Learn about age-related changes in the sexual adjustment of your partner and yourself. Expand your definition of sex. It’s important to move away from intercourse-focused sex to a broader and more sensual interpretation.
- If you’re single, keep your sexual self primed by self-pleasuring.
- Keep the memories strong. Reminisce about the great sex you had in the past. Try to recreate those special memories.
- Stay young mentally. Don’t dress “old” and don’t keep the same hairstyle you’ve had for the last decade. Wear sexy pyjamas.
- Exercise regularly. Mature women who stay active are the ones who feel better about aging in general.
- Use lubrication, make a point of touching more, and compliment your partner regularly.
- Relish the fact that emotional intimacy, non-demand pleasuring and erotic stimulation reach their greatest fruition as a couple ages.

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And beyond

THE SEXOLOGIST: As you head to your 60s and beyond, it’s time to focus more on your health. The unfortunate reality of this life stage is that many of you are widowed or divorced. However, this could be the time to start a new relationship, or give yourself permission to do things you may not have done before.

Dr Eve says this stage is about living an interesting life and making sure you’re vaginally replete. For men, there are clinically proven drugs to facilitate an erection, should this become a problem.

THE MEDICAL VIEW: For those inclined towards surgically enhanced changes, Dr Patel says cosmetic surgery should be sought for the same purposes as good health: because it makes you feel better. He advises planning to spend small amounts often, or accept that at some point you may need extensive work.

At this age, it’s often about the face and neck. What was once dealt with by non-surgical procedures is now better treated with surgical options, such as face and neck-lifts. Botox and fillers still form an adjunct to these procedures.

“Surgery is not what is portrayed by the likes of Mrs Wildenstein, and the windswept look is not the norm. On the contrary, surgery of the face and neck seeks to alter volume, remove excess skin and regain shape in as natural a way as possible for a rejuvenated you.”

Dr Reddy adds that a growing international trend, particularly among women who’ve had children, is G-spot amplification. “It’s a non-surgical, minimally invasive procedure that temporarily augments the G-spot, with effects lasting up to four months. The procedure involves using an injectable dermal filler which is FDA approved for use in facial augmentation. In a pilot study, 87% of women surveyed after the procedure reported enhanced sexual arousal and gratification, although results do vary,” she says.

Feeling your sexual best may take some effort, but it’s worth remembering that it is a journey we can all take part in, whatever our age or stage. ■