



## STEP 4

### SEX & INTIMACY



## 6 Step Sexual Aversion Strategy

### Overcoming Aversion to Sex

The symptoms of aversion to sex are fear of engaging in sex, trying to make the sex act as short as possible, finding that you need to build up your confidence and resolve before sex just to get through it, thinking of excuses to avoid or postpone sex, and feeling ill just prior to sex and somewhat depressed afterward. Some people actually experience panic attacks while engaged in sex. Your symptom of revulsion at the very thought of having sex is also a typical symptom.

However, one symptom that is not due to sexual aversion is vaginal pain. It can cause a sexual aversion, but it is not a symptom of aversion itself. If you experience vaginal pain or discomfort when you make love, it is probably due to an infection or a reflex called vaginismus.

Any of the symptoms of sexual aversion will interfere with your ability to meet your husband's need. How can you meet his need for sex if you have even one of these reactions? You can't. You must completely overcome the aversion if you ever hope to enjoy a sexual experience with your husband. And then be certain that the conditions that led to your aversion are never repeated.

Remember how you developed the aversion in the first place? You associated a certain behavior, having sex, with an unpleasant emotional reaction to something your husband did to you. Eventually the unpleasant reaction was triggered whenever you even thought about having sex with your husband, and certainly whenever you made love.

To overcome the aversion, you must break the association of sex with your husband from the unpleasant emotional reaction. The easiest way to do that is to associate sex with the state of relaxation.

Those **without** a sexual aversion may suggest that you take the direct route: Try to relax next time you make love. However, you and anyone else experiencing this hardship knows that the direct route is usually impossible to follow. The very thought of having sex with your husband probably puts you in a state of near-panic.

So that's where we will begin -- with your thoughts.

#### **Step 1: Learn to relax when you think about sex.**

The exercises that I am recommending to you will require about 15 minutes of your time every day. It is very important that you not miss a day, because the process will not work as well if you allow time gaps in the procedure.

Sit in a comfortable chair in a room by yourself with your eyes closed. If possible, play relaxing music in the background. Think of various experiences that you have had. Some of them will help you relax



and others will make you feel tense. If you have an aversion to sex, whenever you think about making love, you will probably feel your tension rise and it will definitely feel unpleasant to you.

Stop thinking about sex, and redirect your thoughts to relaxing experiences. Then focus on relaxing each muscle in your body. Begin with your feet and move all the way up to your head, focusing your attention on relaxing every muscle along the way. It may take you five minutes or more before you know that all of your muscles are fully relaxed.

When you are completely relaxed, think about making love again, but this time remain completely relaxed. Don't allow any muscle to tense up. As you think about sex, you will notice that some thoughts don't bother you at all, but others, like making love to your husband, may make it almost impossible to remain relaxed.

Don't think about making love to your husband just yet. Think only about sex, in general. Leave your husband out of your thoughts altogether. Investigate your own reactions to sex by imagining various aspects of sex. If you have any sexual fantasies, think about them, and what it is that makes them appealing to you. Then, without thinking of your husband, think about other aspects of sex that are less appealing or downright unappealing. Be completely relaxed while you are thinking of all of these things.

When your first fifteen minutes relaxation exercise is over, take notes of what you learned about yourself. What sexual thoughts were appealing to you, and what thoughts were unappealing? What thoughts made you feel relaxed, and what thoughts made it difficult for you to relax? The contents of this journal should not be shared with your husband until your sexual aversion is completely overcome and you have a mutually fulfilling sexual relationship with him.

If there were certain sexual thoughts (not related to your husband) that made your muscles feel tense, or made your stomach feel tight, repeat this 15 minute exercise each day until you can think about them without feeling tense. You should also journal after each session to help you think through the reactions you are experiencing.

## **Step 2: Learn to relax when you think about having sex with your husband.**

If you have an aversion to sex with your husband, you will feel an unpleasant tension whenever you think of making love to him. So in this step, the goal is to be able to think about it without feeling tension or experiencing an unpleasant reaction.

As I've already explained, an aversive reaction is created when an unpleasant emotional reaction is associated with a situation or behavior. The way to reverse that association is to try to stop the unpleasant reaction from occurring when the situation or behavior is present. If you can feel relaxed just thinking about sex with your spouse, that also tends to "extinguish" the aversive association that was previously made.

Close your eyes, sit back, and relax. Be certain you are alone and without anything or anyone to distract you. Relax all your muscles from head to toe as you did before, and think about making love with your husband.



You will notice that certain thoughts are more upsetting than others. It could be that one of the ways your husband wants to make love is particularly upsetting to you. (The thought of him forcing his hand over your body, particularly putting it between your legs raises your anxiety level.) Eventually you will find that even thoughts of the most upsetting sex acts will no longer elicit an unpleasant reaction. That's because with proper relaxation, you can extinguish your emotional reactions to almost anything.

The information you learn about yourself in this step will help you in the next step, so be sure to continue taking notes in your journal after each 15 minute session. You should document aspects of lovemaking with your husband that create the greatest stress for you. Even though you will learn to be relaxed when you think about them, you will not want to repeat them when you get back to making love to him again.

### **Step 3: Learn to relax when you think about having sex with your husband with him in the same room.**

As soon as you have learned to be relaxed when thinking about making love to your husband, you are ready for the next step, inviting him to join you in the same room.

At first, he should simply sit somewhere else in the room and read a book. Even though he is not paying much attention to you, you may need to start practicing relaxation all over again. His very presence may make you tense.

If you relax all of your muscles from head to toe, you will eventually find yourself comfortable once again. Then, as you think about making love to him, continue to relax.

At this stage, your husband should not say or do anything but sit and read a book. If he cannot follow that simple instruction, we have serious problems. The reason you have a sexual aversion is that he has tried to make love to you in a way that is enjoyable for him, but unpleasant for you. To overcome your sexual aversion, he will need to learn to take your feelings into account when he makes love to you in the future.

But in this step, if he refuses to follow the assignment, and instead of quietly reading, he starts talking to you, or walks over and touches you, stop the procedure entirely. There is no hope for a successful transition to sex with your husband if he cannot follow your simplest requests.

It is essential for your husband to understand that you, not he, must be in complete control of your recovery process or it will not work. If he cannot or will not agree to that, it not only explains why you have the aversion to begin with, but also explains how his lack of cooperation has prevented your recovery.

Continue these exercises every day until you are completely relaxed thinking about making love to your husband with him in the same room. And don't forget to take notes in your journal that describe your experience.



#### **Step 4: Learn to relax when you talk to your husband about having sex with him.**

Now you are ready to tell your husband what you are thinking. Sit back in your comfortable chair and close your eyes. At first, limit your description to sexual situations that you find easy to talk about, and avoid talking about those sex acts that you find particularly disturbing. When you first start talking about sex, you will find your tension rising again, but after a little practice, you will learn to be relaxed as you describe your feelings. He should say nothing to you as you talk to him. All he should do is listen.

As I mentioned earlier, if your husband decides to take charge, and tries to talk you into making love to him after you describe your thoughts, tell him that it is that very thing that created the aversion in the first place. If he cannot follow the program, end it.

Eventually, you should describe as many sexual situations to your husband as you can think of. You may want to refer to your journal to help you remember what some of them were. Whenever you talk about them, try to remain completely relaxed, and you will eventually find that even your most disturbing sexual memories will no longer elicit a tense or anxious response.

#### **Step 5: Learn to relax when you make love to your husband.**

You should ease into a sexual relationship with your husband very slowly and comfortably. Continue to spend 15 minutes each day on this assignment so that you do not lose momentum.

First, you should learn to become comfortable with affection, being able to hug, kiss and hold hands without any fear that it will lead to sex. Then, have your husband rub your arms, feet and lower legs, backs, and other non-erogenous zones (avoid breast, stomach and genital areas), again without it leading to sex. Do the same for him.

When you are comfortable being touched by your husband in non-erogenous zones, and you are comfortable touching him, you are ready to begin the first stages of making love.

I have not discussed feelings of sexual arousal with you, because our goal was to overcome aversive reactions. But by the time you are able to talk to your husband about having sex with him while feeling completely relaxed you may have already started to experience feelings of sexual arousal. The affection you experienced may also have led to feelings of sexual arousal. That feeling of sexual arousal is your signal to make love to your husband. Don't ever try to make love without it.

Remember, if any aspect of lovemaking is unpleasant to you, figure out a way of making it enjoyable. Have your husband rub your back in a way that you enjoy, not just a way that he enjoys. Resist the temptation to go ahead and make love just to make your husband happy, because it is likely to set you back. Remember, if this program is not successful, you will probably go back to not making love at all.

When you are ready for intercourse, have your husband lay entirely motionless on his back at first. Sit or lay on top of him so that you are in complete control of the situation. Experiment with different positions and methods of intercourse so that you can learn how your body works to create the most



enjoyable feelings. Only relinquish control to him after he has become educated in what it is that enables you to enjoy the experience with him.

Sometimes you will experience what behaviorists call "spontaneous recovery," because your habits will all be very new. Spontaneous recovery is when you suddenly feel the old aversive reactions without any warning. When that happens, it just means that there are residual effects still present that crop up from time to time. You'll find that these unexpected intrusions will decrease over time until they hardly ever occur.

**Amazingly enough, if you understand how to turn lovemaking into an enjoyable experience, you will probably want to make love more often than your husband does. Why? *Because the more you enjoy something, the more you will want to do it.***