

Sexual Recovery

Sensate Focus Exercises



After prostate cancer, there are exercises that can help you and your partner reconnect sexually.

Sensate Focus Exercises were developed by sexual health researchers in the 1960s, William Masters and Virginia Johnson.

A sensate focus exercise includes physical closeness and both verbal and non-verbal communication between partners.

Couples tell each other what areas of the body they like to have caressed. They can be as small as hands, face, feet. Partners take turns touching, or gently massaging that area. The idea is for the “toucher” to enjoy the touch and for the “touchee” to enjoy being touched.

It’s important to NOT engage in sexual activity during or immediately after these exercises to preserve a non-pressured atmosphere. In these exercises, the focus is on the pleasure of touching and being touched, not on performance. Of course, you or your partner may become aroused. In order to preserve the non-pressured atmosphere, engage in sexual activity at another time.

How It’s Done

Sensate focus exercises are typically divided into two phases.

Phase 1

Start by defining the area of the body where you want to begin. Avoid genitals and sexually sensitive areas like nipples (or others that you can identify on your own body).

Once you become comfortable with the initial area, enlarge it. Gradually touch larger areas of the body until the whole body becomes accessible. **This can take several weeks.** Don’t rush, stay focused, non-pressured, friendly.

- Try to be as quiet as possible so you do not take away from the awareness of physical sensations.
- Do not think of it as therapeutic massage. It is intended just to increase one’s awareness and to create pleasurable sensation, not to fix a problem.



Getting Ready

Try the ideas below to prepare for a more sensual experience.

Prepare your environment.

Choose a private environment. Use candles, music, scents, or whatever else makes you and your partner feel relaxed. Keep the room warm enough that you're both comfortable.

Make time.

Set aside about an hour for your "dates". Each one can be broken up with different exercises. It's important to choose a time when you will not be interrupted.

Find your comfort zone.

Uncover the area that you decided you feel comfortable uncovering. Some people are immediately comfortable being naked together. Others prefer to start being partially clothed. It is fine to start with small, uncovered areas to see how it works.

Phase 2

During this phase, you can begin to move into generating pleasure.

Talk about it with each other first so that you know where to start. It could be stroking feet, the stomach, again, begin with non-sexual areas.

Talk at the end of each exercise to tell each other what felt good. Decide, by talking, where you'll go next.

Continue to use sensate touch and pleasure-inducing touch to keep your whole body a part of the sensual and eventually sexual experience.

After you have identified pleasurable areas all around each other's body, move towards touching sexually sensitive areas other than genitals.

- This can take 2 or 3 weeks of twice a week activity.
- Gradually move towards pleasuring genitals.

Your Roles

Each of you will have a role to begin your sensate exercises, then switch. One will start out as the partner who will be touched. The other will be the one touching. Before going into your first encounter, decide who will be participating in each role first.

If you are the "toucher", focus on:

- Your own experience of touching (the temperature of your partner's body, the amount of pressure you're exerting, the texture of your partner's skin or hair), and
- Managing distractions (automatic thoughts, feelings, etc). Always keep bringing attention back by focusing on what your touch feels like to you.

The "touchee" focuses on:

- The experience of being touched (temperature, pressure, texture), and
- Moving or redirecting the toucher's hand if sensation is uncomfortable in any way. When the toucher is ready, they say "switch".

Your First Exercise

This brief activity is meant to give you an introductory experience of what it's like to participate in sensate focus exercises.

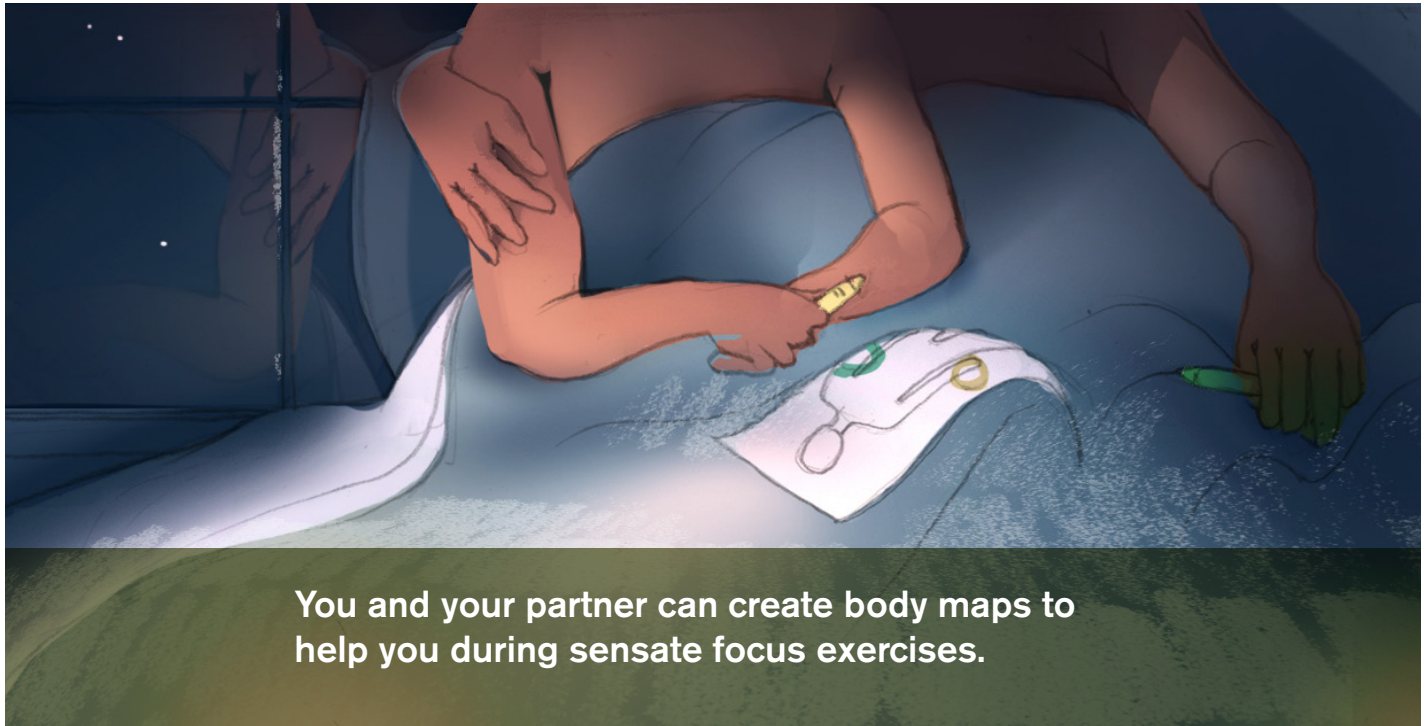
- Begin by sitting in a comfortable position, facing each other.
- One of you start by massaging the other person's hands for 5 minutes.
- Take a few minutes to discuss what you enjoyed about the experience.
- What did it feel like to touch and be touched?
- Next, switch roles and repeat.

Use this exercise to get you started, then expand to other areas as you get comfortable.



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Sensate Focus Exercises: Body Mapping



You and your partner can create body maps to help you during sensate focus exercises.

How to do Body Mapping

- Print out appropriate maps from the following pages.
- Draw on your map to show the areas of your body you want your partner to touch.
- As you gradually increase the areas over time, reprint and update your body maps.

