

“You Want To Try *What?!*” How to Approach Sexual Experimentation

By Michael Castleman

Your sex life isn't exactly boring, but it's not fireworks either, not like it was in the early days of your relationship. Perhaps you're in a sexual rut. But even if you're not, maybe your groove feels like it's headed in that direction. Maybe you've been fantasizing about trying some variations to keep things fresh and exciting—perhaps some lingerie, or a certain sex toy, or something a little kinky. But you're not sure how your honey will react to your ideas.

It's Difficult to Request *Any* Change, Sexual or Not

Asking for a change in any aspect of couplehood means taking a risk. But when you ask for sexual changes, the risks can feel overwhelming. You might fear that your lover will think you're more dissatisfied than you really are. You might fear accusations of being “weird.” And if you're always the one interested in sexual experimentation, you might feel reluctant to appear pushy or demanding. These are all legitimate concerns.

But, on the other hand, you crave some novelty in the sack. How do you make it happen? It may be less difficult than you think.

Try Some New Things Out of Bed

Trying new things in bed is a subset of trying new things in general. As people become more willing to try new things out of bed, they tend to become at least a little more open to sexual experimentation as well. So, a good place to start promoting sexual novelty is in the area of nonsexual fun. Suggest a new restaurant, a new hiking trail, golf course, or some home redecoration. Keep things playful. Try to see your injections of novelty as experiments. Many experiments fail. That's fine. So what if you or your honey decides you don't like the new restaurant or whatever. What's important is a mutual willingness to continue experimenting to try new things together.

New things need not be major things. When you're trying to persuade a lover of the joys of experimentation, small changes are significant steps in the right direction. Be patient. Try to keep a sense of humor.

If your honey is a real stick-in-the-mud, no matter how much that trait might frustrate you, you can, ironically, use it to encourage experimentation. Many fuddy-duddies don't abhor change as much as they really enjoy what's familiar. But the familiar always feels more comfortable and cozy when you return to it from something else. In other words, to truly appreciate the familiar, it helps to take some breaks from it. One of the pleasures of vacations is returning home to your own bed, your familiar surroundings. But to enjoy that pleasure, you have to take the vacation. If you'd like your honey to experiment more, it usually helps to celebrate returning to the tried and true. Try gently pointing out that novelty is the gateway to appreciating the familiar.

Surprise Dates

One way to enjoy playful mutual experimentation is to take turns planning "surprise dates." Here are the rules: One of you takes complete responsibility for planning the date and keeps it a secret until it's time to leave home. The other agrees to go along for the ride. The planner specifies what to wear and when to meet, and agrees not to plan anything that will truly unnerve the other. The follower agrees to play along, even if the date involves something unfamiliar, for example, dance lessons or a moonlight canoe ride.

Even without an overtly sexual component, secret dates carry an intimate, erotic charge. You're focused on each other. You're sharing special time together. Both of you must trust one another. Both share in the anticipation of special, possibly unusual time together. And both know that next time, the tables will turn.

For your first several surprise dates, don't introduce any sexual novelty. Give your lover time to warm up to the notion of regular novelty-and to trusting you not to overdo any surprises. When you decide to introduce some sexual novelty, say so in advance, refrain from anything too out of the ordinary, and reassure your lover that what you have in mind is new, but not threatening.

Because they are intimate-and implicitly erotic-even when they're not overtly sexual, surprise dates can be easily, and deliciously transformed into opportunities for sexual experimentation. Say you're the planner, and you take your reluctant-to-experiment honey to an old familiar bar, then on to an old favorite restaurant, and

from there, to a stroll along an old familiar route. By the time, you've walked 50 yards, your spouse is bound to ask: "So, what's the surprise? What's new and different?" To which you reply: "Wait till we get home."

Birthdays, Anniversaries, Valentine's Day

Once you've introduced the idea of ongoing experimentation, your birthday, anniversary, Valentine's Day, and other dates that hold special meaning for the two of you are good times to take things a bit further. Again, don't expect any great leaps beyond your lover's comfort level. But compared with other days of the year, it's often easier to ask for experimentation on special days-and the other person tend to be more likely to grant such requests.

Why Hotels Often Spur Erotic Novelty

When it comes to sex, the setting has a great deal to do with willingness to experiment. That's why so many couples discover that romantic getaways produce sexual enhancement. Hotel rooms contain nothing that reminds you of all your responsibilities back home or at work. They're a time-out from your life. At a hotel, it's easier to live in the moment, to step out of familiar routines, and try new things.

You can bring a bit of the same freshness to sex at home by making love at a different time or in a different room of the house.

Lubricant as Gateway to Novelty

But how do you introduce something really different into your sex life? For example, how do you persuade a reluctant lover to try sex toys? A good place to begin is to introduce lubricant into your lovemaking. For the vast majority of people who try them, lubricants enhance sex immediately. As a result, your novelty-shy lover is very likely to enjoy instant sexual benefits from this little experiment. In addition, if your ultimate goal is to introduce sex toys into your relationship, vibrators, dildos, and many other toys provide the most pleasure and fun when they are well lubricated, so you'll want lubes to be familiar and handy when you introduce toys.

Be Patient

When working to coax a reluctant lover to try new things in bed, it's very important to be patient. Warming up to sexual novelty often takes time. Give your lover the gift of that time. Take small steps along the path to your ultimate goal.

This is especially true when a lover says: "We're too old for that." Advancing age makes many people reluctant to try new things. But it also opens doors to novelty. If your partner dismisses your promotion of sexual novelty by saying "you can't teach an old dog new tricks," ask what your spouse plans to do after retirement. Retirement plans often include: more travel, more time for hobbies, more socializing, and perhaps moving to a new home—all new things for old dogs. If you can consider a huge change like moving, is it so difficult to conceive of playing with a vibrator?

Half a Loaf Is Better Than None

As you move slowly away from your old routines and toward experimentation, you may have some ultimate sexual goal in mind. If you reach that goal, great. But most lovers find that getting part of what they desire is almost as good. There's an old saying: Half a loaf is better than none. In sex, half a loaf can feel quite wonderful. If you don't get the whole loaf, count your blessings. Half a loaf often feels like a major improvement.

For individualized assistance dealing with negotiating a mutually satisfying sexual repertoire, consult a sex therapist. To find one near you, visit aasect.org, the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists, or sstarnet.org, the Society for Sex Therapy and Research.