

## Whole-Body Massage: The “Language” of Great Sex at Any Age—Especially After 40

By Michael Castleman

Beyond feeling deep emotional attachment, what is the key ingredient of fulfilling lovemaking? Sex therapists agree that it’s leisurely, playful, whole-body, massage-style caresses. Every square inch of the body is a sensual playground.

Most women understand this intuitively. Unfortunately, many men do not. As men become sexual, many focus on only a few corners of the body—their penises and women’s breasts and genitals—and largely ignore everything else. For many men, this habit persists well into adulthood. But as men enter their 40s, as erections begin to become balky and as sexual urgency begins to subside, most men come around to appreciating massage-based whole-body sensuality—and if they don’t, they should.

The skin is the body’s largest organ. When massage-style caresses excite it—*all of it*—anxiety melts away, mood improves, and pain subsides, all of which contribute to enjoyable sex. In addition, leisurely, playful, whole-body massage helps prevent and treat men’s sex problems, notably rapid ejaculation and erection difficulties. It’s also *critical* to women’s sexual responsiveness. Without extended, whole-body massage, many women find it difficult or impossible to become sexually aroused, let alone have orgasms.

### **Erotic Arousal: Men and Women Are Different**

Compared with women, men tend to become more aroused visually. Men love watching a lover undress or seeing her in lingerie. Men’s visual orientation is a big reason why pornography is produced for men, and why so many men become hypnotized by it.

Women tend to become aroused through touch—gentle, whole-body massage. Sex therapists often advise couples to take turns arousing each other the way they like best. A woman can dance a strip-tease for her man, and then once she’s naked or

close to it, the man can take her in his arms and massage her all over, so both of them can get turned on.

## **Touch is the Only Sense We Can't Live Without**

Human beings can live rich lives without sight, hearing, taste, or smell. But deprive infants of loving touch and they *die*. That's what happened toward the end of the 19th century when some leading American infant-care experts insisted that holding and cuddling babies was "primitive." Hands-off infant care was embraced by many affluent, well-educated Americans determined to greet the new 20<sup>th</sup> century with the latest scientific wisdom. The staffs of the nation's many orphanages also stopped cuddling infants on the advice of the experts. However, this message did not trickle down to poor, less educated women, who continued to hold, hug, and cuddle their infants as their ancestors always had. By 1910, pediatricians were reporting a strange new disease that caused healthy infants to withdraw, lose weight, and die. They called it "marasmus" from the Greek for wasting away. Marasmus, now called failure to thrive, became epidemic in orphanages. It also struck infants in affluent families. But poor families were unaffected. Eventually, physicians identified its cause—lack of cuddling. When parents and orphanages returned to "primitive" infant cuddling, marasmus disappeared. Today, child development experts agree that infants cannot be held and cuddled too much.

Failure to thrive has never been documented after infancy. But the fact that lack of touch can cause death even for a brief period of life shows just how important it is. We should think of touch as an essential nutrient transmitted through the skin. Cuddling and massage are deeply nurturing and relaxing. They are also fundamental to mutually fulfilling sex.

The skin contains two types of touch-sensitive nerves. The sensation of pain—fingers on a hot plate, or a pebble in a shoe—is transmitted to the brain through nerve fibers that trigger release of stress hormones. But the skin also contains other nerves, C-tactile fibers, that respond to pleasing touch and stimulate release of other hormones that produce feelings of relaxation and well-being. Gentle massage stimulates release of oxytocin, a hormone associated with feelings of pleasure and attachment. Oxytocin enhances sexual pleasure and contributes to arousal and orgasm.

## **Why Many Men Resist Massage-Based Sex. And Why They Should Reconsider**

Unfortunately, many men remain unconvinced of the importance of massage in great sex. Their skepticism stems, in part, from the fact that as they leave childhood and enter adulthood, many men “lose touch” with touch. Men slap each other’s backs, but they don’t share gentle, affectionate touch the way women do. Rediscovering the pleasure of whole-body touch and massage is an important part of sex therapy for many men.

Another reason men are often skeptical of massage-based lovemaking has to do with the term typically used to discuss loving touch: “foreplay.” Foreplay implies something you do *before* the main event, intercourse, something separate and distinct from it. Many men engage in very perfunctory foreplay, most of it focused on women’s breasts and genitals. In their headlong rush into intercourse, they ignore the rest of women’s skin.

Rushed foreplay represents a major misunderstanding of how women respond sexually. Most women prefer extended, playful, total-body massage that includes their breasts and genitals—but is not fixated on them. In fact, to experience sexual arousal, most women *absolutely require* total-body caressing.

Rushed foreplay is also a one-way ticket to young men’s sex problems, notably rapid ejaculation and erection difficulties. Many rock songs talk about doing it “all night long.” But with rushed foreplay, many men can’t even do it for two minutes. The reason is that the penis is a very sensitive fellow. He enjoys getting aroused, but if he gets too hot too quickly, he can’t take the pressure, and he either ejaculates quickly, or goes soft. Extended, whole-body caresses distribute sexual arousal around the entire body, which takes the pressure off the penis. It still becomes highly aroused—in fact, *more* aroused—but because you’re aroused from head to toe, your penis isn’t the focus of all the arousal, which helps the little guy behave as you’d like him to.

Finally, rushed foreplay is out of synch with how men over 40 respond sexually. After 40, the male nervous system loses some of its sexual excitability. As men age, it takes them longer to become aroused and respond to erotic play. In other words, older men become more like women. As men age, they, too, *need* leisurely, playful, whole-body massage to get the most pleasure from sex.

## **Try a Professional Massage**

Men who feel skeptical of whole-body touch might change their minds if they experience a professional massage—not what’s offered at massage parlors, but a nonsexual, 60- to 90-minute massage by a certified massage therapist. Professional massages help men get used to the idea of slowing the sensual pace to allow plenty of time for mutual whole-body touch. My advice to skeptical men: Give massage a chance. Make love a few times shortly after a professional massages. I bet your penis behaves better, your lover becomes more aroused and responsive, and “all that touchy-feely crap” starts making more sense. My advice to women: Give your man a gift certificate for a good massage with the promise of something even better afterwards.

Formal massages can be wonderful preludes to horizontal romps, but they’re not necessary for whole-body sex. You can enjoy many of the same benefits simply by taking a hot bath or shower together before making love. Use soft washcloths and scented soap over every square inch of each other’s bodies. The warmth relaxes muscles made tense by the daily grind. And soaping and drying each other can be a marvelous whole-body, massage-like turn-on. For extra sensual enhancement, dry off with warm towels. Before you get into the water, drape your towels over a radiator or pop them into the dryer, so they’ll be warm when you use them. You can do the same with bathrobes.

Replacing rushed foreplay with leisurely, playful, whole-body caresses is probably the single most woman-pleasing change men can make in their lovemaking. And once men get used to it, they usually find that extended sensuality also enhances their own experience of sex.

## **Not “Foreplay,” Loveplay**

Now, back to “foreplay.” Forget it. Instead, think of every moment of sex as “loveplay.” Foreplay implies linear lovemaking, first kissing, then the man’s hands on her breasts and between her legs, then intercourse, then it’s all over.

In contrast, loveplay is more open to sensual creativity. You might light some scented candles, and have a glass of wine, listen to music, or watch an erotic video while, gently holding each other, kissing, and stroking each other’s faces and arms. Next you might feed each other little snacks as you undress, caressing each other some more. Then you might shower together, dry each other. After that, you might repair to bed, turn on some music, and lie face-to-face, kissing, lightly caressing each other. Then, you might suckle each other’s nipples for a while. Next, you

might trade foot massages, and after that, fondle each other's genitals for a time, and then treat each other to oral sex. After a while, you might have intercourse (if that's possible for you), then uncouple and feed each other some more snacks, while continuing to kiss and caress one another. Next, you might return to oral sex or genital hand massage or intercourse, but in some different positions. And on and on, all night long. None of this is foreplay. None of this necessarily comes before anything else. It's all lovemaking. It's all loveplay.

Many women wish men would learn that sex is best when it involves the whole body. The genitals are certainly important, but so is everything else. Every square inch of the body is a sensual playground. Great sex excites all of it.

**References:**

Miller, AS and ES Byers. "Actual and Desired Duration of Foreplay and Intercourse: Discordance and Misperceptions in Heterosexual Couples," *Journal of Sex Research* (2004) 41:301.

Mohn, T. "The Spa Experience as Tuneup: Reports Discover That Men and Women See Massage Differently," *New York Times*, 5-31-2005.

NewScientist.com. "Scientists Reveal the Secret of Cuddles." 7-28-2002.

Stubbs, KR and LA Saulnier. *Romantic Interludes*. Secret Garden Press, Larkspur, CA. 1988.