

Can Mindfulness Help with Sexual Difficulties?

What is mindfulness?

A mindfulness-based approach helps people cultivate a nonjudgmental and compassionate awareness of their body, breath, and all sensations.¹ Through regular mindfulness practices, one can develop skills in observing present-moment awareness of thoughts, emotions, and bodily sensations, often focusing on the breath, body sensations, sounds, and with practice—thoughts themselves.¹

This approach encourages a person to redirect their attention when the mind wanders and to cultivate calmness toward all objects of attention.²

Over the past decade, “pure” mindfulness programs—those that do not incorporate other therapies like CBT—have been studied for their effectiveness in addressing sexual problems.^{1,2}

One well-powered randomized trial evaluated an 8-session group mindfulness program for women with sexual interest/arousal disorder. The results showed significant improvements in sexual desire and distress, with strong effect sizes.^{1,3} These improvements were fully sustained a year later. Furthermore, several systematic reviews have confirmed and replicated these findings.

Does mindfulness work for sexual dysfunction and sexual pain?

There is good evidence that mindfulness-based sex therapy can be used to address sexual dysfunction whether delivered in person or online, individually or to couples, and even in groups.^{1,2,4,5}

Mindfulness can help patients:

- **Reduce cognitive distractions:** Mindfulness targets cognitive distractions, inattention, and self-judgment during sex—factors that can hinder awareness of bodily sensations and contribute to sexual difficulties and arousal problems. Such distractions can also disrupt the pathway from arousal to responsive desire. As such, any person who experiences problems in these domains may be a candidate for mindfulness-based approaches to their sexual difficulties.^{2,4,5}
- **Increase awareness of bodily sensations:** Mindfulness helps patients connect with their physical sensations, improving their ability to notice arousal cues. It can also help patients dealing with sexual pain (e.g. vulvodynia or endometriosis).^{2,4,5}
- **Manage self-judgment:** Mindfulness cultivates a kinder and more accepting view of oneself, which is important for individuals struggling with performance anxiety or self-consciousness during intimacy.^{2,4,5}



Who is mindfulness suitable for?

Clinicians should consider mindfulness for patients experiencing any of the following challenges²:

- Desire and arousal difficulties
- Sexual pain conditions (e.g., vulvodynia, dyspareunia)
- History of trauma or sexual abuse
- Anxiety or depressive symptoms affecting sexual function
- Cognitive distractions or negative thoughts during sexual activity
- Perimenopausal symptoms leading to decreased desire and arousal
- For those patients who express a preference for non-medical approaches to managing sexual difficulties

Who can deliver mindfulness-based therapy?

Mindfulness is secular (i.e., non-religious) and as such, can be delivered by any practitioner trained in mindfulness-based approaches.¹ Most individuals will have first received training in sex therapy, and then acquire additional training in mindfulness-based interventions.

However, it is important to know that any provider can recommend mindfulness and explain the basic tenets of mindfulness practice, even if they have not received specialized training.

How can a practitioner use mindfulness in their practice?

1. Discuss mindfulness with a patient

To introduce mindfulness you might say:

"Mindfulness is a way to focus on the present moment without getting caught up in thoughts or worries. For some people experiencing sexual difficulties, it can help reconnect with their body's natural responses during intimate moments."

"Would you be interested in learning a few simple exercises that could help you feel more connected to your body?"

To explain how mindfulness can help you might say:

"When we're distracted or focused on negative thoughts during intimacy, it can be hard to notice what our body is feeling. Mindfulness can help you tune into the sensations of your body and emotions without judging them, which may help with desire and arousal. It's like training your mind to focus on what's happening now, rather than getting caught up in worries."

2. Encourage regular practice

You might say to a patient:

"Mindfulness isn't about trying to stop your thoughts; it's about noticing them without getting carried away by them. Practicing for even a few minutes each day can make a difference in your ability to stay present. Over time, it might help you feel more comfortable and present during intimate moments and feel more sexual feelings."

"During intimate moments, if you notice your mind wandering or feeling stressed, try to bring your focus back to the sensations in the body you're experiencing—like the feeling of your partner's touch or your own breath."



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3. Provide resources and information for patients interested in learning mindfulness.

Here are some resources that provide practical mindfulness exercises that you can consider trying:

- **Mindfulness Exercises:** Explore free mindfulness exercises designed to enhance sexual well-being. These audio recordings include body scans, mindful movement, and awareness of sensations. You can access them here: [Mindfulness Exercises](#)
- **Watch the Video:** Discover key concepts from *Better Sex Through Mindfulness* in this short video. It's a quick and engaging introduction to mindfulness practices for improving sexual well-being: [How mindfulness can help with your sex life](#)

- **Explore the Book:** *Better Sex Through Mindfulness: How Women Can Cultivate Desire* offers valuable insights and practical strategies for enhancing sexual desire and intimacy. Click the link to learn more: [Better Sex Through Mindfulness: How Women Can Cultivate Desire](#)

- **Apps:** There are apps that offer guided mindfulness exercises specifically designed to enhance intimacy and sexual well-being such as [Headspace - Mindful sex](#)

4. Refer patients to trained therapists:

If they prefer a more structured program. Directories such as [sstarnet.org/find-therapist](#) can help locate specialists in your area.

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 - 5 Rashedi, S., Maasoumi, R., Vosoughi, N., & Haghani, S. (2022). The effect of mindfulness-based cognitive-behavioral sex therapy on improving sexual desire disorder, sexual distress, sexual self-disclosure, and sexual function in women: A randomized controlled clinical trial. *Journal of Sex & Marital Therapy*, 48(5), 475-488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0092623X.2021.2008075>

