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## love, actually

From tantra to chocolate, these top-10 libido-boosting moves will get you in the mood *By Serena French*



of Leslie Beck's *10 Steps to Healthy Eating*. Foods that are nutritious and easy to digest are the best aphrodisiacs. "Avoid ones that can dampen your desire by causing bloating and gas. These include starchy foods and gassy vegetables, such as broccoli, Brussels sprouts, bell peppers and onions," she says. Begin your meal with oysters, an aphrodisiac food since ancient times. "Not only are oysters easy to digest but they're also an excellent source of zinc, a key mineral for healthy sperm. Finish your meal with chocolate to rev up your mood. Chocolate contains phenylethylamine, a natural chemical that some experts say stimulates the same feelings that people experience when they're in love," says Beck.

### 1 Get active

"Exercise is one of the best approaches to de-stressing yourself, addressing depression and giving yourself a positive mood," says Manny Radomski, professor emeritus of physiology at the University of Toronto. "The fitter you are, the less stressed you are." Exercise does not stimulate a particular sex hormone, such as testosterone, estrogen or progesterone, but Radomski does recommend an aerobic exercise program, including walking, jogging and biking, and, if necessary, taking off some weight. "Increasing your aerobic

capacity will have side benefits in terms of well-being, physical performance and, very indirectly, libido," he says. But don't overdo it: "Too little is no good for you, but neither is too much," including intensive training for marathons. You'll start to affect your immune system and you may get too tuckered out to pucker up.

### 2 Eat this!

Plan a romantic meal with foods that have long been believed to have aphrodisiac powers, says Leslie Beck, a registered dietitian in Toronto and author

### 3 Go downward dog

Andréa French, a yoga instructor at Studeo 55 in Vancouver, advocates couples yoga. "Because yoga is non-competitive, it's an ideal couples activity. They are exploring something new with someone who they love and trust," she says. Couples class is contact-based: holding hands or supporting each other in balancing postures. But doing the positions solo is good foreplay, too, as the breathing work in yoga reduces stress levels. "It activates our parasympathetic nervous system, which reduces our blood pressure." ▶▶

says French. "As you reduce your blood pressure and your stress level, that's naturally a link to increasing your libido." Yoga can be calming or energizing, but either way it impacts self-esteem. "How we feel about ourselves is directly linked with how active we are. As we feel better, we approach our relationships in a more confident way," she says.

## 4 Come clean

No one feels like getting dirty when you're feeling, well, dirty. Shari Creed has developed a line of intimate grooming products called Sweet Spot Labs, designed specifically for a woman's sweet spot, ensuring there's a match in pH levels, with a view to keeping it happy and healthy. "It's a very important part of getting in the mood. Feeling fresh gives you a sense of confidence," says Creed. "The products make you feel clean and refreshed and ready to rock 'n' roll." Try a bath by candlelight, but dispense with the bubbles, says Creed, "as they disrupt your sweet spot's chemistry." Use a few drops of essential oil instead.

## 5 Bliss out

Recent studies on Buddhist monks have proven that meditation can train the mind and reshape the brain, changing, for example, triggers for anger. With practice, the brain is reoriented from stressful on-alert mode to one of chill acceptance, a shift that increases a sense of contentment. The concentration part of the brain gets more of a workout: you learn to be totally aware of the moment and, frankly, what could be better for sex? Find a quiet place, close your eyes and concentrate on your breathing or a word. Try 10 minutes, then 20. The idea is to shut out the world so you can stop processing information flooding in from the senses.

## 6 Fight!

You can't be a lover and a fighter at the same time. Take out your aggression

through kickboxing or a martial art so your mind is free of anger or hostile thoughts. James Hines of Toronto's Totum Life Science gym recommends Muay Thai boxing, the national sport of Thailand. "It's a high-intensity, explosive workout. Nothing burns more calories and releases more stress," says Hines. In Thailand, combatants use their fists, elbows, knees and legs to fight and to score points in the ring, which is used as the basis for Totum's training program. "When you have spent 60 minutes skipping rope, doing push-ups, shadowboxing and pounding the heavy bag with every ounce of your being, you are relaxed and relieved," says Hines. "Your body is awash in 'feel-good' endorphins. This, in turn, will help you get your groove on."

## 7 Muscle meltdown

Get primed with a massage on your own, or do it at home *à deux*. "Most of us hold our tension and stress in our trapezius muscles, the coat-hanger muscles that run from the back of the head out toward the shoulders and down the back," says registered massage therapist Joey Lattanzio of Absolute Spa in Vancouver. "When you squeeze the broad muscles, it stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system and increases relaxation. Slow, sedating strokes seduce the muscle." Laurel Kline, a clinical psychologist at the Female Sexual Medicine Center at UCLA, says to create the time and the space to be with your partner: "A massage can be a sensual way to connect and a way to relieve stress at the same time."

## 8 Get happy

Depression can really affect your libido. If you opt to get help through therapy and medication, be aware that many common antidepressants have side effects, including weight gain and sexual dysfunction. The SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor) class of drugs, which

includes Prozac, Paxil and Zoloft, are strongly linked to sexual dysfunction. Solutions include augmenting the antidepressant with another medication until the treatment is complete. Once off the drugs, try a program of regular exercise and meditation.

## 9 Get enough sleep

Chronic sleep disruption appears to be the single biggest trigger for depression and we know what that does to the libido. How to stop the insanity? Don't panic. Literally. The sleep system tends to right itself naturally. After a few days of insomnia, go to bed one hour later for a week to 10 days, but don't sleep in: that can disrupt your sleeping pattern. A warm bath can help to relax the body before sleeping, as can exercise. While sleeping, keep your room as cold, dark and noise-free as possible.

## 10 Try tantra

You don't have to be Sting and Trudi to give tantra a go. To start, focus on revving up your kundalini energy. Tantrics believe that once this energy source, located at the base of your spine, is awakened, it will provide you with not only intense feelings of joy but also of deep relaxation—the perfect state for foreplay! Start with visualization: find somewhere quiet and spend 10 minutes deep breathing while practising Kegel exercises (squeezing and releasing the muscles you use to stop urine flow). If you notice your back starting to arch, that's a sign that your kundalini energy is kicking in. Try it with your partner lying in the spoon position. Take deep breaths focusing on each of your seven chakras (energy centres) and placing your hands on those body parts one at a time (crown, forehead, throat, heart, stomach, sacral—which is just below the navel—and the root, which is at the perineum). You may notice those areas becoming warm as your energy increases and so, no doubt, will your desire. ■