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Eat Your Way To Great Sex

Which foods enhance your mojo in the bedroom? Read on

by Valerie Frankel

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Food is love. Food is comfort. What Grandma didn't tell us and probably didn't know ...

Food is also Sex.

Certain consumables can light up your lovemaking. For the record, I'm not talking about the so-called aphrodisiacs that resemble human genitalia such as oysters and figs. The way a food looks might be visually arousing or psychologically compelling. Bonbons and champagne no doubt conjure up thoughts of seduction and romance. But for your body to respond to sex like a well-oiled, orgasm-primed machine, none of them does a hell of a lot.

So what foods will help you have mind-blowing sex?

Like you, I craved such information. Sex with my husband Steve was still good after 6 years. But once you've done it with the same person a few thousand times, you need a little extra something to go beyond a run-of-the-mill encounter. I knew that many women -- as many as 30 percent, actually -- don't experience orgasms at all, so I considered myself lucky.

Yet I was also keenly aware of the difference between the exhilarating sex that Steve and I had during our first year and the kind we have now. Sure, we've tried to keep things hot. But [toys](#) (mine) and [reading erotic texts](#) (his) aloud haven't revived that early excitement. I longed for the instant arousal, nonstop passion, and physical blastoffs that once made my head spin. Wouldn't it be awesome to get that back simply by picking the right meals? Because I had to eat to survive, I figured eating for kicks would kill two birds with one bite.

Taking it from the top

The journey from lifting a fork to increased gratification begins in the brain. "From a psychological standpoint, if you take care of your body by eating well, you'll have a better attitude about sharing it. You'll be more open to sensations and experiences," says Lou Paget, author of several best-selling sex guides including [The Great Lover Playbook](#) (Gotham). No doubt we all know women (heck, we may have even been such a woman!) whose sex life went down the tubes when scarfing nachos during "Lost" became a substitute for healthy meals. But if a woman eats well, she'll feel better about herself and -- Paget says -- "Her sexual attitude can improve immediately."

But that's not the only benefit of eating well. Certain nutrients can enhance your mojo, says Lynn Edlen-Nezin, Ph.D., a clinical health psychologist who co-wrote [Great Food, Great Sex: The Three Food Factors for Sexual Fitness](#) (Ballantine Books). "You can absolutely eat your way to better sex. As a rule of thumb, what's good for the heart is good for the genitals," she explains. "If your plumbing -- e.g., your heart -- is clear above the waist, you'll also have better blood flow and more sensation below."

First item on the menu? [Nitric Oxide](#). "NO is a 2-atom gas made by the endothelium tissue in blood vessels in the lining of sex organs," Edlen-Nezin says. "When you become sexually aroused, a neurotransmitter

sends a message to the lining of the genitals to release NO which causes blood vessels to expand.” Without an adequate amount of it, guys can’t get erections and women can’t become engorged and lubricated.

Ergo, Edlen-Nezin suggests that you say yes to **arginine** -- an amino acid the body uses to create NO. Ingesting additional arginine has beneficial effects on blood flow which, in turn, can improve your cardiovascular health according to 2 studies done in the 1990s. *The International Journal of Cardiovascular Interventions* published a report noting that supplemental arginine may improve blood flow in coronary arteries. And an article in *The Journal of Clinical Investigation* showed that arginine significantly improved circulation in young adults with high cholesterol.

Although this research is not the definitive word on dietary arginine, Edlen-Nezin claims that adding it to your diet will improve your sex life. “I call foods high in arginine the 'Staminators',” she explains. “It can contribute to prolonged arousal.” To find arginine in the supermarket (sadly, not among the cupcakes), swing by the nut aisle and toss bags of almonds and walnuts into your cart. Then cast your eyes toward the seafood counter for salmon, cod and halibut. An added benefit to fish: **Omega-3** fatty acids, which can improve cardiovascular health and lower triglycerides and may increase dopamine production and reduce the risk for depression -- all pluses for the **libido** and orgasm potential. Edlen-Nezin recommends salmon and herring. (Non-fish lovers can have omega-3-fortified eggs.)

Fuel up on healthful foods

The other major ingredients in a sexually souped-up diet are **antioxidants**. “They keep your plumbing clean and your cells healthy by mopping up free radicals -- molecules that wreak havoc on the body in a process called oxidation,” Edlen-Nezin says.

Her advice is to load up on antioxidant-rich produce in all colors of the rainbow including tomatoes, red peppers, garlic, spinach, broccoli, beets, berries and red grapes. Another good source is **dark chocolate**. In fact, a study of 163 women in *The Journal of Sexual Medicine* found that those who consumed at least one cube of chocolate daily reported significantly greater desire and better overall sexual function than the individuals who abstained. The reasoning: High-flavonoid chocolate consumption has been linked to improved circulation. More chocolate equals better sex? You don’t have to tell me twice.

I felt encouraged by my new shopping list. It looked a lot like my old one. Unwittingly, I’d been following the "Great Food, Great Sex" diet for years. Perhaps that explained why my sex life is already satisfying. “Unfortunately, the vast majority of Americans aren’t eating lean meat, fruit and veggies,” Edlen-Nezin says. “They’re having a steak and baked potato with butter for dinner tonight. They’ll fall asleep on the couch with their belt undone.” And not in a sexy, loosen-up-my-buttons kind of way.

“One of the first things I tell women is to take the best care of their bodies. And to exercise and eat healthfully,” Paget says. “It’s elementary. Give your body good fuel and it will operate better. Fill it up with garbage fuel and it won’t run.”

Adds Edlen-Nezin: “The Great Food, Great Sex diet isn’t a fad. It’s a guide to eating basic, healthy foods which -- as a culture -- we don’t eat enough of. Load up your plate with lean, bright, beautiful foods and you’ll have a dynamic sex life.”

Beyond food

“A healthy, balanced diet sets the table for being sexually satisfied,” explains Marrena Lindberg, author of [The Orgasmic Diet: A Revolutionary Plan to Lift Your Libido and Bring You to Orgasm](#) (Crown). “But to get to the next level, you actually have to do a bit more.”

Lindberg is not a doctor. She is a data-mining programmer with a degree in mathematics from Brown University who became an amateur clinical researcher to test her theories. Her first subject? [Herself](#). Years ago, Lindberg was one of the many women who struggle to orgasm. She was deeply unhappy and stuck in an erotically unsatisfying marriage. Even so, she did want to have a child. To prepare for a pregnancy, Lindberg weaned herself off the antidepressants she'd been prescribed and improved her diet. Once pregnant, she started taking fish oil supplements at a nutritionist's recommendation.

Then after she gave birth, Lindberg began doing pubococcygeus (PC) exercises to strengthen her weakened vaginal muscles. The surprise result of all these adjustments: Lindberg became spontaneously orgasmic. Spontaneously as in she was driving her car, listening to the radio, tightening her PC muscles to the beat, and then -- Bam! -- she climaxed. Right there on the highway!

The combination of supplements, dietary changes, and vaginal fitness apparently did the trick. Lindberg began an extended period of trial&error, experimenting with dosages and cranking up her PC workout routine until she reached her maximum orgasm potential with her husband. “Now I'm continually orgasmic during sex,” she says. “Every 3-or-4 thrusts, I have an orgasm. Dozens in a row. I'm not telling women that they should be like me. I'm making up for lost time. Like a polio kid who grows up to be a marathoner. I'm just trying to get the information out there so women can empower themselves sexually.”

Since she first shared her experience online 5 years ago, men have flocked to meet her, driven by curiosity, she explains, adding, “I'm 41, overweight, and not especially attractive. But I receive an amazing amount of male attention.”

Sign Me Up! Not for the hordes of drooling men trying to get to know me. But for that continuous vaginal-orgasm action. Although my clitoris was reliable, I'd had fewer G-spot orgasms than I could count on one hand. Lindberg assured me I could improve on that. Her promise that on her plan, clitoral orgasms would happen more quickly -- in addition to being longer and deeper -- also intrigued me.

Daily supplements

Despite their chemical complexity, Lindberg's theories are pretty simple. She contends that increasing your level of “free testosterone” (women [do](#) produce small quantities of testosterone) may fuel friskiness. Because [magnesium and zinc](#) counteract the effect of a protein in your blood that binds with the hormone, Lindberg advocates adding more of these minerals to your diet to help increase the free testosterone circulating in your bloodstream and ramp up your desire. Taking the recommended daily allowance of 1,000 milligrams of calcium, 320 mg of magnesium, and 8 mg of zinc (note: the 3 minerals can be taken in one pill) can help put you in the mood, she says.

In addition, she suggests downing a good multivitamin daily (with even more of the trifecta) to meet all your antioxidant and iron needs as well as a glass of orange juice for extra vitamin C. The excessive vitamin and mineral levels gave me pause. But Christine Gerbstadt, M.D. -- a spokeswoman in Sarasota, Florida for the

American Dietetic Association -- says, "It's safe to take twice the RDA plus a multivitamin. The RDAs are meant to cover a wide range. And if you have normal kidneys and no unusual diseases, there's no downside."

Lindberg also says that Americans don't get enough cardio-friendly **omega-3** fatty acids. She recommends large doses of high-grade omega-3 fish oil capsules. Based on my weight, I'd have to take 6-a-day, each containing 500 milligrams (combined) of the 2 specific fatty acids EPA and DHA. But her prescription levels are controversial as fish oil acts as a blood thinner.

"I do not recommend megadosing with fish oil," Dr. Gerbstadt says. "You increase the risk of bleeding. Especially when you take it in combination with things like blood-thinning medication, aspirin, vitamin E, or ginkgo. When you disrupt the clotting cascade in your body, you can bleed -- internally or externally. If you bump your head or fall down and start bleeding, you can have a serious problem on your hands."

I decided to take the risk. But before you ingest that much fish oil, be sure to check with your doctor.

A "ThighMaster" for the vagina

Laura Berman, Ph.D., director of the Berman Center (a women's sexual-health clinic in Chicago) also weighed in and was cautious about wholeheartedly embracing fish oil as a sex enhancer. "Everyone's looking for a magic bullet," she says. "Certainly, omega-3 is good for cardiac and brain health. Omega-3 has been linked to dopamine production. If science can prove that omega-3 directly boosts libido and sexual response, that will be very promising. But the research hasn't been done yet."

Lindberg readily admits that no scientific data on libido, sexual function, and omega-3s exists. She is trying to get funds to do clinical trials. In the meantime, she's collecting feedback from hundreds of women who have tried her plan -- all to great success. "There's no incentive for a pharmacological company to fund research," she says. "No one stands to make money on this plan." Indeed, you can already get all of the supplements that Lindberg recommends at your local drugstore.

Of course, no diet is complete without [exercise](#). Lindberg suggests a workout for your vaginal muscles, which you might have ignored at the gym. "Kegels are not enough," she insists. "To get the necessary tone for vaginal-orgasm ability, try a resistance device. I've met many women who thought they had great tone ... until they tried one."

Lindberg prefers the GyneFlex -- a 3-inch-long, 2-inch-wide plastic V that looks like a ThighMaster for your vagina. (Check it out at GyneFlex.com.) One inserts the gizmo and engages the PC muscles to try to make the 2 ends of the V click together. I was supposed to put in 15 minutes of "clicking" with my GyneFlex 2 times a week. If it would help, I was down (there) with that.

Test-driving the plan

The plan's dos -- fish oil, vitamins, healthy foods, PC workouts -- seemed acceptable, although I was a little hesitant about taking 10 pills per day: 6 fish oil capsules, 1 multi, and 3 calcium-magnesium-zinc. I went to the health food store and stocked up (about \$50 for a one-month supply). Then I ordered a \$40 medium-resistance GyneFlex online.

On the other hand, I would sorely miss the diet's don'ts. It warns against the effects of smoking, alcohol and caffeine consumption. A few times a month, I enjoy bumming a cigarette from a friend, especially when I'm drinking. But both tobacco and alcohol elevate serotonin, which throws off the brain's delicate dopamine

balance. Caffeine can have the same anti-orgasmic effect, sadly. And as a 3-cups-per-morning java junkie, I was doubtful about this aspect of the plan.

But I was determined to give the program a try. I substituted orange juice with seltzer for coffee the next morning and endured a raging caffeine-withdrawal headache all day (which did not make me feel hot in the nether regions). My menus included the usual abundance of skinless chicken, salads, fish, fruit, and whole grains. I managed the huge number of pills by portioning them out over the whole day. Steve watched me taking the pills -- curious yet cynical -- but he couldn't join me because he takes one of those medications that can't be mixed with fish oil. "Men on the plan will get the cardio benefits," Lindberg says. "But all that dopamine might lead to premature ejaculation." And no one wants that.

After a week, I didn't notice any change except grouchiness due to coffee deprivation in the morning. "It takes at least 2 weeks," Lindberg assured me. "You'll notice a change in libido and in clitoral and vaginal sensitivity. Also, the fish oil will make your hair and skin look youthful. Your eyes will shine. And you'll get regular as clockwork." That much I'd observed. And appreciated.

But as far as the increased sensitivity -- nothing. I dutifully took the pills and did my PC crunches with the GyneFlex. I was -- as instructed -- squeezing my husband during intercourse, waiting for the G-whiz moment to happen. My hair and skin looked shiny and bright. The fish oil had cured my chronic scalp dermatitis. My orgasms? About the same. My libido? Absolutely fine, but unchanged.

Cheating on the diet

Impatient and frustrated, I resorted to drinking coffee again. After all, what's a diet without cheating? Besides, in a study at Southwestern University in Georgetown, Texas, scientists increased libido in female test subjects by giving them caffeine. Granted, the test subjects were rats. And the scientists aren't sure the results would translate to humans who already drank caffeine. So what?! The study was justification enough for me. One cup in the morning wouldn't completely compromise my diet. Or so I hoped.

Meanwhile, I wasn't having much success with the GyneFlex. I turned out to be one of those women who thought she had great muscle tone ... only to realize she was as flaccid as mush. I inserted it and squeezed as hard as I could as if to stop the flow of urine. But the 2 legs of the GyneFlex barely budged. I struggled until red-faced and sweaty. Abdominal crunches are nothing compared with vaginal ones. I wondered if I could strain or pull a PC muscle and how I might ice that. I started skipping sessions. Shortly thereafter, the GyneFlex barely made it out of the drawer where I kept it.

My enthusiasm for the whole project was waning. It had been nearly 3 weeks since I popped my first fish oil capsule and my genitals were still not all atwitter on the highway or in the bedroom. When would I have an orgasmic breakthrough?

A body in overdrive

In hindsight, I think I was too focused on waiting for my body to go into overdrive. That's because the first day that I was so busy with mothering duties for my 2 daughters, a deadline, and a grueling workout that I didn't even have a moment to think about the state of my libido. I found myself initiating sex with Steve despite my fatigue. A kiss and a grope later, I was in full erotic ardor as if we'd been at it for much longer. Not to get too graphic, but my sensitivity was electric. This was no ordinary night between the sheets. Afterward -- both of us panting -- I said to Steve, "I think the plan is working."

“Working” turned out to be the understatement of the year. The change (which seemed to take forever to occur!) gave me whiplash when it finally arrived. My sex life went from a '3' to a '9' seemingly overnight. I can only describe it as “louder” -- set at a higher volume by every measure. I found myself thinking about sex constantly. I couldn't get anything done.

And poor Steve! By the end of the month, he started to look scared when I climbed into bed at night. I scaled back on the testosterone-freeing calcium-magnesium-zinc by one third. My libido calmed down enough for me to get through an entire dinner without tackling my husband.

G-spot orgasms remain elusive, and Lindberg tells me I won't experience them unless I use the GyneFlex. I don't really care. I've crossed an important threshold: I've gone from enjoying sex to flat-out loving it! The results have been purely physiological and are unrelated to emotion or psychology. I haven't reduced my stress level by taking bubble baths or become gooey and romantic because Steve took out the trash without my telling him. We haven't lingered over a candlelit dinner. God knows, he hasn't given me diamonds. It was a truly physical awakening.

It's been 2 months since my libido surged and although I haven't become spontaneously turned on as Lindberg was (not yet, anyway), I am a damned happy woman. That smile on my face? Can't wipe it off. Steve is excited for me. And that has brought on fresh enthusiasm. We're back to the beginning -- the jolt of instant arousal and persistent hum of desire. But we also have the trust of six years together to lift us up to new sexual heights. And the view from above is breathtaking.

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