

Age-in-Reverse Special

# Women's Health

## FLAT ABS

### Now!

Take the Fast  
Track to a Lean,  
Sexy Belly

## MORE SEX, BETTER SEX!

Up the Action—  
and Satisfaction

## Fall in Love with Your Job

7 Life-Changing  
Career Tips



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WomensHealthMag.com



*WHY FIT  
WOMEN  
HAVE MUCH  
BETTER  
SEX*

BY cindy kuzma / PHOTOGRAPHS BY richard phibbs

The time you spend  
working out can  
have unexpected  
payoffs when  
you're tangling the  
sheets. And  
understanding the  
link can help you  
achieve more  
explosive results—  
in the bedroom and  
the weight room.  
Now *that's*  
hot and heavy.



*THE PERFECT PLAYLIST HELPS GET YOU IN THE MOOD. SWEAT BEADS ON YOUR SKIN. YOUR HEART RACES AND YOUR MUSCLES CONTRACT. BY THE TIME YOU'RE FINISHED, YOU'RE BREATHLESS, MAYBE DRAINED, BUT ALSO GLORIOUSLY SATISFIED.*

**What popped to mind first—your last great workout or your last sex session? Getting busy at the gym and getting busy between the sheets run along parallel cardiovascular, muscular, and neurological pathways, which is why they set off similar chain reactions. Until recently, however, experts were less clear on how (or how much) their paths crossed.**

**Over the past few years, researchers have made some important discoveries about the body and brain connections of sex and exercise. “Being physically active seems to be a potent aphrodisiac for women,” says Tina M. Penhollow, Ph.D., an associate professor of health promotion at Florida Atlantic University, who has published research on how exercise affects sexual self-esteem and self-perception. In fact, regular exercise may play a more important role in sexual satisfaction than many other factors, including stress, weight—even your current relationship status (or lack thereof).**

**Think of it this way: Relationships are most successful when both partners are all in—and it's no different here. Taking charge in the gym can lead to surprising benefits in the bedroom, and vice versa. Learn how to forge a better connection.**

NEED  
SOME GYM  
MOTIVATION?  
CONSIDER  
THAT  
WORKING  
OUT...

**1** ...BOOSTS FOCUS  
All too common: He's kissing your neck, but you're thinking about that major work deadline. Exercise can help sync your mind to your body, as well as quiet your racing brain so you can focus on the task at hand, says Lori Brotto, Ph.D., director of the Sexual Health Laboratory at the University of British Columbia in Canada.

**2** ...ACCELERATES AROUSAL  
Studies have shown that women who frequently exercise become aroused more quickly and are able to orgasm faster and more intensely. University of Texas at Austin researchers found that female study participants were 169 percent more aroused (as indicated by blood flow in genital tissue) while watching a short porn flick after 20 minutes of vigorous cycling than when they watched it without riding beforehand. When you get excited, blood surges into the clitoral bulbs, making the entire region around the vagina responsive to pleasure. Cardiovascular exercise can help blood pump faster to the right parts of your body; it can also reduce chronic inflammation, which can damage blood vessels and decrease circulation, putting a damper on your sexual bliss.

**3** ...BUILDS STRONGER PIPES  
A healthy pair of lungs helps express your elation with more gusto, of course, but you'll have a lot more to scream about if you learn to control your breath. Partners who breathe in tandem may create a bigger buildup, which can intensify pleasure. And women who take short, quick breaths as they reach climax—rather than holding their breath—may reduce carbon dioxide in the blood, possibly intensifying vaginal contractions. Yoga can help women focus on their breathing, while high-intensity interval training increases lung capacity—which ensures you'll be vocalizing your gratification through the grand finale.

4

#### ...REVS UP YOUR LIBIDO

During a single strength workout, your body produces higher levels of growth hormone and testosterone, hormones that play a pivotal role in muscle growth—and sex drive. A 2013 study found that hitting the weight room regularly (three days a week) keeps levels of these hormones higher. That, along with the stress-busting benefits of pumping iron, can stoke greater sexual desire, says Kim Chronister, Psy.D., author of *The Psychology Behind Fitness Motivation*.

5

#### ...ENHANCES IN-THE-SACK ENDURANCE

Some women can take 12 minutes—or longer—to orgasm. If your body fizzles out prior to that, you may be missing out, says sex therapist Denise Onofrey. Regular physical activity improves stamina and trains your muscles to hold out longer by using energy more efficiently. The result? You won't have to pause prematurely to give your aching arms or tired legs a break during your next epic sex session.

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## SEXERCISE SMACKDOWN

*WH* gets to the bottom of a few other rumored connections between sex and exercise.

### **SOME WOMEN ORGASM MID-EXERCISE.**

True: Indiana University researchers found that about 40 percent of women who reported having an exercise-induced orgasm (better known as “coregasms”) said their experience was during abdominal exercises like leg raises. Next in line? Weight lifting (27 percent), yoga (20 percent), and bicycling (16 percent).

### **SEX COUNTS AS A WORKOUT.**

Nice try, but no: In most cases, sex should be filed in the “light activity” category—right next to bowling or a casual stroll. Tantric sex sessions aside, the average American sexual intercourse lasts about eight minutes. Even if it's super intense, the effort isn't enough to get you a free pass from the gym.

### **CYCLING CAN HURT YOUR HOO-HA.**

True, but rarely: The excessive pressure that exists in cycling—as well as in horseback riding and jet skiing—is reported to cause sexual dysfunction, says Irwin Goldstein, M.D., editor in chief of *The Journal of Sexual Medicine*. These activities can increase the risk of damage to your pudendal nerve, which sends signals to and from your clitoris. Initial soreness can be expected during your first few times on a bike; wearing padded shorts can help reduce pressure.





# THE POWER OF PLEASURE

Having more sex can actually score you better results from your workouts. Solo sex counts too!

## PAIN RELIEF

Research shows that female pain tolerance increases significantly during orgasm, thanks to a rush of hormones that act as natural painkillers. Experts note the effect can linger for up to two days, so there's another payoff: You may be able to push a little harder during your next workout.

## MIND GAMES

People with active sex lives tend to work out more and have better dietary habits than those who get it on less often, according to experts. Why? During sex, as well as exercise, your brain releases higher levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that fuels motivation. The brain learns to seek more both in the bedroom and the gym, says Chronister.

## SWEET DREAMS

After an orgasm, levels of prolactin and oxytocin rise, bringing on a drowsy feeling, which over time helps improve sleep quality, says Chronister. That's crucial for your fitness: Sleep spikes levels of muscle-building hormones and aids recovery. (And in one study, basketball players who slept two extra hours every night for six weeks hit more free throws.)

## HAPPY HEART

Research has found that women who have more orgasms and more frequent sex may have a higher resistance to coronary heart disease and type 2 diabetes.

# 6

## ...GETS YOU FEELING SEXIER

Exercise transforms the way you view your body—and how you enjoy sex. Penhollow found that women who exercised frequently and reported higher levels of personal fitness were more likely to rate their desirability and sexual performance high above average. But it's not necessarily because of a slim physique. Researchers found that women of all sizes who reported greater body appreciation (for their physical abilities, such as progress in the weight room) were more easily aroused, enjoyed sex more, and had more orgasms.

# 7

## ...LIGHTENS YOUR MOOD

Even feeling just a little down in the dumps can weaken desire, says Chronister. Exercise leads to an immediate rush of mood-lifting, stress-dissolving endorphins; it's such a potent anti-depressant that some research suggests regular workouts are as effective as psychiatric medications.



# 8

## ...HELPS SHED INHIBITIONS

Some women get seriously distracted—even totally turned off—when their partner touches one of their less-than-favorite body parts mid-romp. A consistent workout routine can help: When Italian researchers put a small group of obese women with sexual complaints in a supervised weight-loss program (that included diet and about 10 hours of low-intensity exercise per week), they not only lost an average of 35 pounds but also reported higher levels of lubrication and sexual frequency after 16 weeks. Study authors note that weight loss does more than improve body image: It also helps improve insulin resistance. Overweight women whose bodies can't use the hormone to process glucose also tend to have lower levels of testosterone, which dampens self-confidence and sexual response.

# 9

## ...MAKES YOU MORE SENSITIVE

And we don't mean crying during sex. The tissue that forms the clitoris contains 8,000 nerve fibers that extend into the entire pelvic region, including the vaginal walls. Researchers at the University of Texas at Austin found that physical activity was able to prime a woman's body for sexual activity by making her more sensitive to touch and increasing the efficacy of stimuli, likely by revving up a network of neurons known as your sympathetic nervous system, which controls your arousal, says Brotto. ■

## THE BETTER-SEX WORK-OUT

Kegels aren't the only exercise with down-below payoffs. Bring on the fireworks with these four simple strength moves from New York City personal trainer Jennifer Searles. Mix three sets of each into your regular gym routine up to three days a week for more gratifying sessions in the sack.



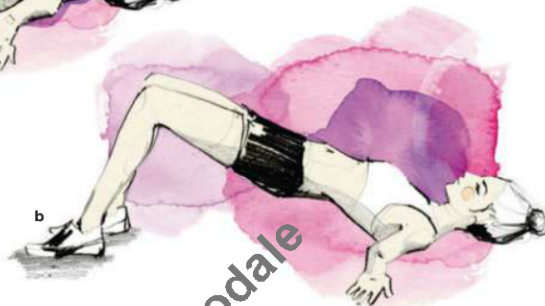
### WALL SIT

*This isometric move builds strength in stillness—perfect for helping you hold tricky positions longer.*

**DO IT:** Lean against a wall with your feet about two feet away from it, then bend your knees to 90 degrees and raise your arms in front of you. Hold for 60 seconds. (Too easy? Place a weight in your lap.)



**DO IT:** Lie faceup on the floor, knees bent and feet flat (a). Press through your heels to raise your hips so your body forms a straight line from shoulders to knees (b); squeeze your glutes for 10 seconds, then lower hips without letting them touch the floor. That's one rep. Do 12.



### HIP THRUST

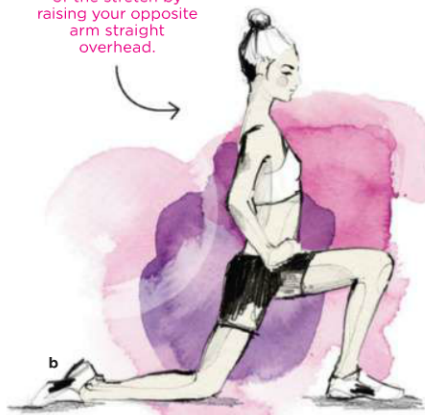
*This motion improves hip mobility and glute strength to increase your dynamic power (or, shall we say, your thrust capacity).*

### HIP-FLEXOR STRETCH

*Whether you have a kinky new pose you're dying to try or you just want to be able to wrap your legs around him, developing more hip flexibility is crucial.*



**quick tip**  
Increase the intensity of the stretch by raising your opposite arm straight overhead.



**DO IT:** Kneel with one foot in front of you, knees bent 90 degrees. Keep your torso upright and rest your hands on your hips (a). Gently push your hips forward as far as you can, maintaining an upright torso (b). Hold for 10 to 20 seconds, then repeat on the other side.

### LEG-LOWERING DRILL

*Be forewarned: This core toner may cause more intense O's.*

**DO IT:** Lie faceup on the floor, arms out, and raise both legs 90 degrees (a). Keeping your legs together and core engaged, slowly lower your legs, stopping just before they touch the floor (b). Pause, then slowly raise them back to start. That's one rep; do 10. ■



**quick tip**  
Keep your legs tightly together and your knees slightly bent.

