



Q&A

Is the key to a more satisfying sex life all in your mind? Psychologist and researcher **Lori Brotto** explains how multi-tasking is the enemy of desire

By SARAH BOESVELD

◆ Though the obstacles to having great sex as you get older (work, fatigue, boredom) can seem insurmountable, Lori Brotto would tell you the key to a more satisfying sex life is in your head. Since the early 2000s, the Vancouver-based psychologist and sex researcher has helped hundreds of women by teaching them mindfulness: focusing on touch, sensations and being in the moment. Her new book, *Better Sex through Mindfulness: How Women Can Cultivate Desire*, hits shelves this spring. Brotto spoke with *Chatelaine* about the brain's role in the bedroom and how multi-tasking might be killing your desire.

When you put the words sex and mindfulness together, I think Sting and Trudie Styler, hippie-dippie tantric sex. But that's not what you're talking about, right? Because, honestly, who has the time?
My philosophy is about practising mindfulness during sexual encounters, but it's also about learning and cultivating that

skill in your life in general. If you're constantly multi-tasking throughout your life and never fully present, the brain becomes hard-wired. It's going to be really hard to be present during sex.

So multi-tasking is bad for our sex lives?
Research has shown that rapid multi-tasking is really bad for our brains in general. We might feel like we're accomplishing a lot by switching between tasks very quickly, but with each switch it's actually more taxing on our brains. Sexuality and sexual response require a kind of brain-body integration. It's not just a reflex. So if the brain is used to switching between things, when it comes to sex, it's easier to get distracted or switch into thinking about more negative things.

Doesn't sound hopeful for orgasms.
No, it's going to totally be a turnoff!

What has your research found about the benefits of mindfulness in sex?

One consistent finding is that women [who practise more mindfulness] will report more desire, arousal and sexual satisfaction. We also find improvements in mood and reductions in anxiety. We've got a big randomized, controlled trial we're doing now in which we're trying to figure out: Who are the women who benefit most? Is it women who have a background in yoga? Is it the women who are more depressed? We don't know yet.

You write in your book that, early on, you and your team were sure that busy women weren't going to buy into the idea of practising mindfulness to improve their sex lives. But they totally did.

We do have people who, in their first session, say, "Meditation is not for me" or "I'm actually someone who loves multi-tasking." It takes a little bit longer to have some buy-in, and they have to personally notice the benefits before considering incorporating it into partnered encounters. It helps to show them neuroimaging studies and how different parts of the brain change in response to mindfulness. And framing it as something you can do in your office while you're pausing for lunch, or while you're eating dinner, goes a long way.

So how do you know when you can bring it into the bedroom?

It's usually after about five weeks with our groups. At first, you do it on your own through masturbation. Then you can use that awareness to really tune in and maybe feel sensations in a way you never have before. But every person is different.

Imagine you're in an elevator and have one minute to convince a total mindfulness skeptic of your work. What do you say?

That there's actually strong evidence you can exercise that muscle of mindfulness. It doesn't matter what age you are, you can exercise the ability to notice things in a new way. And when you do that—wow, the outcomes are so vast. Suddenly your experience in the moment is so full and so different than it was before.

Full of orgasms!
Well, maybe not in the elevator.

This interview has been condensed and edited for clarity and length.