

A WORKSHEET FOR COUPLES

# INTIMACY MENU: YES / MAYBE / NO

A starting place for the wide territory between hand-holding and sex. Fill it out separately, then compare. The point is to widen the range, not to checklist your way through it.

## CONTEXT MATTERS — EMILY NAGOSKI'S DUAL-CONTROL MODEL

Sexual response works through **accelerators** (things that turn you on) and **brakes** (things that turn you off). The same activity can be a yes in one context and a no in another. Most desire problems are not about missing accelerators. They are about brakes that have not been released — stress, resentment, exhaustion, body image, performance pressure, distraction. This worksheet works best after the brakes that have been on lately get addressed first. More on the [dual-control model](#) in our glossary.

## THE "YES, AND" PRACTICE

Instead of an immediate "no" or "not tonight," start by naming what part of a suggestion you could say yes to, or what would make a yes possible. **Sounds like:** "Yes, and I'd want to start with [something gentler] first." Or "Yes, and I'd want it later when I'm more settled." **For responsive desire:** "Yes, and I might need 20 minutes of low-pressure touch before I know if my body comes online. Let's start and see." Skip the practice when the answer is genuinely no.

## SETTING THE STAGE

Building accelerators, releasing brakes, and the anticipation through the day.

- Y  M  N Hot yoga, partner workout, dance class, or shared physical activity
- Y  M  N Walking, hiking, or running together
- Y  M  N Going on an actual date — new venue, dressing up, breaking routine
- Y  M  N Cooking together with intention
- Y  M  N Hotel or away-from-home stay together
- Y  M  N Skinny dipping or shared nudity outside of sex
- Y  M  N Couples workshop, retreat, or class together
- Y  M  N Sleeping naked together
- Y  M  N Sex playlist you make together
- Y  M  N Time apart that builds anticipation
- Y  M  N Addressing resentment or stress first (brakes off before accelerators on)
- Y  M  N Sleeping enough that you have capacity for it
- Y  M  N Setting the scene before — fresh sheets, candles, music ready
- Y  M  N Sexy text during the day
- Y  M  N Voice memo, flirtatious or appreciative
- Y  M  N Sending a photo (with mutual consent)
- Y  M  N Leaving a written note
- Y  M  N Putting on lingerie or specific clothing ahead of time
- Y  M  N Telling your partner what you've been thinking about
- Y  M  N Initiating with a specific suggestion rather than an open question



## COMMUNICATION & IDENTITY

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The foundation everything else rests on. Language, consent signals, safety, and your hard limits. For items with a give/receive distinction below (manual, oral, massage, anal), mark each direction separately if your answer differs.

- Y M N Preferred words for your body and genitals (note your own)
- Y M N Words you do NOT want used for your body or gender
- Y M N How you signal you want to slow down or stop (verbal, gesture, code word)
- Y M N How you signal you want more, or want to continue
- Y M N How you like to be checked in with mid-session ("is this good?" vs silent attunement)
- Y M N What makes you feel safe and respected during intimacy (note your own)
- Y M N Hard limits — what's always a no for you (note your own)
- Y M N Trauma triggers your partner should know about (share what feels right)
- Y M N Public displays of affection — hand-holding, kissing, leaning in
- Y M N Sober vs altered states preference (alcohol, cannabis, etc.)

## QUIET CLOSENESS

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Low effort, low or no clothing-off. The everyday connection layer.

- Y M N Long hug, 20+ seconds
- Y M N Holding hands while talking
- Y M N Cuddling fully clothed
- Y M N Head and scalp scratching
- Y M N Foot or hand massage (non-sexual)
- Y M N Sensual massage — giving and/or receiving
- Y M N Specific words of affection (saying "I love you," nicknames, your own)
- Y M N Eye gazing, one to two minutes
- Y M N Spooning while falling asleep
- Y M N Slow dancing in the kitchen
- Y M N Co-regulation breathing together
- Y M N Bath or jacuzzi together, companionably
- Y M N Reading in bed separately, with physical contact
- Y M N Falling asleep on the couch together watching something

## MEDIUM-ENERGY

The bridge most couples are missing between hand-holding and sex.

- Y  M  N Slow kissing, multiple minutes, no goal
- Y  M  N Body massage, with or without oil, clothes optional
- Y  M  N Sensate focus — non-goal touch, taking turns
- Y  M  N Making out on the couch
- Y  M  N Mutual undressing, slowly
- Y  M  N Slowly undressing your partner (you do the undressing)
- Y  M  N Slow strip tease for your partner
- Y  M  N Wrestling or playful physical horseplay
- Y  M  N Tickling, playful
- Y  M  N Watching something erotic together
- Y  M  N Listening to audio erotica together
- Y  M  N Reading erotica aloud to each other
- Y  M  N Dancing close, full-body contact
- Y  M  N Non-genital touching anywhere else
- Y  M  N Outercourse — clothed or partially clothed contact
- Y  M  N Body worship — slow appreciation with words and touch
- Y  M  N Showering or bathing together with intentional touch
- Y  M  N Watching each other in a mirror
- Y  M  N Mutual breathing while in close contact

## HIGHER-ENERGY

Genital, fully sexual.

- Y  M  N Manual stimulation, giving or receiving
- Y  M  N Oral, giving or receiving
- Y  M  N 69 — simultaneous mutual oral
- Y  M  N Intercourse
- Y  M  N Mutual masturbation (each self-pleasures with the other present)
- Y  M  N Trying a new position
- Y  M  N Quickies
- Y  M  N Longer session over an evening
- Y  M  N Sex at a non-default time (morning, midday, away from home)
- Y  M  N Anal play, giving or receiving (with consent and preparation)
- Y  M  N Hickies or marking the skin (consent-based)
- Y  M  N Edging — delaying climax intentionally
- Y  M  N A session focused entirely on one partner's pleasure
- Y  M  N Sex in a non-bedroom location at home
- Y  M  N Outdoor sex in a private spot
- Y  M  N Sex during your period or your partner's period



## AFTERCARE

The 10 to 60 minutes after. Strongly associated with relational satisfaction.

- Y M N Cuddling for 10 to 30 minutes
- Y M N Water and a snack together
- Y M N Compliments and gratitude expressed out loud
- Y M N Debrief — "what did you love about that?"
- Y M N Showering together, easily, no agenda
- Y M N Slow re-entering the day, no rush back to phones
- Y M N Deep breaths together while still touching
- Y M N Changing the sheets together
- Y M N Sleeping next to each other afterward
- Y M N Specific verbal reassurance ("you were wonderful")
- Y M N Doing nothing together, just being present
- Y M N Reflecting together on what was best about it

**How to use this worksheet.** Fill it out separately, compare on a calm evening. Where you both wrote yes is your core menu. Honor every no. **This list isn't all-inclusive\*, and yeses shift over time** — revisit after big life changes (surgery, postpartum, new medication, illness, a new chapter together).

- Is there a maybe that could become a yes with a change in setting, timing, or what comes before it?
- What's one item you'd like to try in the next month?

**\*Not every yes shows up here.** Heavier kink, more specific acts, group or non-monogamy configurations, and identity questions need a real conversation — not a checkbox. Write your own in the margins, and bring anything that matters to therapy.

**Want to go deeper?** Our companion handout, [Intimacy Menu Add-Ons](#), covers mood, toys, role play, and light power dynamics. Many items work for couples who don't identify as kinky. At [mymentalclimb.com/resources](http://mymentalclimb.com/resources).

**If desire differences have become a recurring source of hurt,** book a free 15-minute consult at [mymentalclimb.com](http://mymentalclimb.com) or call (925) 414-0192. Couples and sex therapy across California.

**EDUCATIONAL ONLY — NOT THERAPY.**