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4th Edition

# Sex

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**Dr. Ruth K. Westheimer**

America's favorite sex therapist

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# Sex

4th Edition

**by Dr. Ruth K. Westheimer  
with Pierre A. Lehu**

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## Sex For Dummies®, 4th Edition

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# Introduction

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**H**umans have been having sex since time immemorial, and not much changed as the centuries slid by. Then in the 1960s, the Pill came out, women could easily control whether or not to become pregnant, and the sexual revolution began. Other advancements followed so that today many more women who couldn't have orgasms are now orgasmic, and many older people, particularly men, can have sex into their 90s. People are talking to each other about their sexual needs, leading to greater satisfaction, but although we've made progress, more needs to be done.

Millions of young people just beginning their sexual lives need to be taught what to do and how to do it — as safely as possible. There continue to be millions of adults who are still having sex the way cave men and women did in the Stone Age, never having received the message that terrific sex is possible. Dating, that all-important precursor to sex, has changed dramatically. More members of the LGBTQ community can express themselves, but discrimination persists. And finally, many people are still derailed by sexual myths. So although the need for this book has lessened in some ways since it first came out, my job of educating people about good sexual functioning is not yet over.

## About This Book

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Do you know how I learned about sex? I was about ten, and my parents kept a marriage manual in a locked cabinet way up high. I had to pile books on top of a chair to reach it, so I literally risked my neck to learn the facts of life. You're so much luckier because everything you need to know is right here in the palm of your hand. (Okay, not *everything*. If you have a serious problem, you may have to turn to a professional for help, but at least after reading this book, you'll know whether you really need to do that.)

Just as you can have sex many different ways, you can use this book a variety of ways. You can read it from cover to cover, but it's okay if you skim it too. The table of contents at the front of the book and the index in the rear can point you to the topics you're interested in. Also, when I talk about something important that you should know that you may have skipped, I always refer to the appropriate chapter.

And because I cover such a wide variety of material, I'm going to suggest that instead of keeping this book on a bookshelf in the basement, you keep it right by your bed — or on the kitchen counter if that's where you most often engage in sex!

Now, let me say something about my philosophy at this point.

- » I am old-fashioned and a square.
- » I believe in God, I believe in marriage, and I believe in morality.

But, because I can't dictate to you how you should live your life,

- » I believe that I must give you the tools with which to conduct yourself as safely as possible.

That's why I believe in giving you information so that, even if you do have pre-marital sex or even extra-marital sex, at least you have a better chance of not causing unintended pregnancies and not catching a sexually transmitted disease.

Do I encourage people to develop a relationship before they engage in sex with another person? Absolutely. And I'll say it again and again throughout this book.

But even if you're having a one-night stand, I still want you to wake up the next morning healthy and safe. And I look at this book as an important tool in reaching you and others of all ages to help you discover more useful information on this important subject.

I've written this book so that you can 1) find information easily and 2) easily understand what you find. And although I'd like to believe that you want to pore over every last word between the two yellow and black covers, I actually make it easy for you to identify "skippable" material by presenting it in sidebars (or the shaded boxes that appear here and there). This information is the stuff that, although interesting and related to the topic at hand, isn't necessary reading.

Also, some of what I write is addressed to a particular sex. But it's not a bad idea to know what's going on inside the head and body of someone else. So although you may not *have* to read what's addressed to the opposite sex, you still may want to.

I also include material for gays and lesbians. Straight readers may or may not want to skip those parts, but gays and lesbians shouldn't ignore most of this book's contents because much of the information doesn't depend on the sexual orientation of your partner. Of course, if you are in a same-sex relationship or if

you and your partner are senior citizens, you don't have to worry about causing an unintended pregnancy, so you can safely skip that material.

To help you navigate through this book, I've set up a few conventions:

- » I use *Italics* for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that are defined.
- » **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate the action part of numbered steps.
- » `Monofont` is used for Web addresses.

Some Web addresses may have needed to break across two lines of text. If that happened, rest assured that I haven't put in any extra characters (such as hyphens) to indicate the break. So, when using one of these Web addresses, just type in exactly what you see in this book, pretending as though the line break doesn't exist.

## Foolish Assumptions

One assumption I can make is that if you're capable of reading this book, you're a sexual being. Some other assumptions I've made include

- » You want to improve your sex life. I'm not assuming your sex life is bad, just that you'd like to make it better.
- » You don't come from Victorian England when mothers would instruct their about-to-be-wed daughters to just "lie back and think of England."
- » You're reasonable enough not to engage in risky behavior after the dangers have been pointed out to you.
- » If you're a newbie, whether a teen or just inexperienced, you're eager to learn the facts of life and avoid the pitfalls of the myths.
- » And if you're a parent, who either wants to give this book to your child or just have it nearby for reference when talking to him or her, you know how important this information is, but you also know that in the end, your child is responsible for his or her sex life.

# Icons Used in This Book

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Important information is highlighted with little pictures, called icons, lurking in the margins. Here's what the ones used in this book signify:



TIP

This icon alerts you to useful tidbits of information, including tips to enhance sexual pleasure.



DR. RUTH  
SAYS

This icon points to practical advice and my personal thoughts on today's sexual dilemmas.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

You'll see this icon next to medical descriptions of your anatomy or physical conditions.



SEXUAL  
MYTH

This icon highlights some of the things you may think you know about sex that are false or misleading.



WARNING

This icon signals behaviors that could cause trouble, either for you or someone else, and tells you when to look before you leap to stay clear of pitfalls to your relationships.

# Beyond the Book

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This book is full of helpful and essential information, but you can find even more online! Just go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for "Sex For Dummies Cheat Sheet" to find tips on foreplay and adding more variety to your sex life, as well as six common myths about sex.

# Where to Go From Here

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Whether you consider yourself a Don Juan, a Lady Chatterly, or a sexual novice, the first piece of advice I have for you is that everybody can become a better lover given the proper instruction. And because we're all sexual beings, whether we like it or not, why not get the most out of the pleasures our bodies are capable of giving us?

This book is organized so you can go wherever you want to find complete information. Want to know about genital warts, for example? Head to Chapter 21. If you're interested in oral sex, go to Chapter 15 for that. You can use the table of contents to find broad categories of information or the index to look up more specific things.

If you're not sure where you want to go, you may want to start with Part I. It gives you all the basic info you need to understand sex and points to places where you can find more detailed information.

Wherever you begin, relax and read on. I guarantee that, by the end of this book, you can take the dunce cap that you may be wearing off your head and perhaps replace it with a condom somewhere else!





# 1

## **Getting Ready for Sex**

## IN THIS PART . . .

Find out all about how babies are created and the enjoyment that process brings with it.

Gain a better understanding of the male organ.

Take a tour of the female genitalia and discover the changes it undergoes as a woman ages.

Social media has had a strong effect on dating, and it's vital to learn how to date in the brave new world to avoid the growing epidemic of loneliness.

Gone are the days when a couple waited until the wedding night to have sex, but that means the phrase "timing is everything" has become more relevant than ever.

Develop an understanding of the important role commitment plays in a romantic relationship.

Having sex can bring a lot of enjoyment, but it also carries risks that you need to learn how to avoid.

Being a teenager always means going through changes, but in the 21st century those changes have themselves been altered and require GPS rather than a road map.

- » Understanding why people have sex
- » Choosing the right partner at the right time
- » Making babies
- » Determining whether a potential partner is sex worthy

## Chapter **1**

# So You Want to Know More about Sex

**S**ex. Once you're under its power, you're a captive for life. It starts when you're young. When you're a teenager and your hormones are surging, almost everything you do is connected to sex in one way or another. And although your sexual voltage goes down a notch or two as you get older, many of your daily activities are still influenced by sex.

- » You take a shower in the morning and do your hair to increase your sexual attractiveness.
- » You choose clothes that will draw the attention of other people.
- » You send sexual messages with your body language, from the way you walk to the angle you hold your head.

And it doesn't matter whether you're single or married, young or old, all of us are interested in how others react to the image we project. We want to be noticed. We want to know that we can still attract someone, even if we've been monogamously involved in a relationship for 50 years.

In this chapter, I give you a brief course in Sex 101, so that you and I will be clear about what I mean when I talk about sex. Although sex hasn't changed much since men and women emerged from the cave, today's sexual environment is open to confusion, so this chapter covers the basics.

# What Is Sex, Anyway?

Is sex just the way we differentiate ourselves, male and female? Or is it the means by which we reproduce? Is it a yearning that makes us go a bit crazy until we can satisfy those urges? Or could it be the key to exchanging extreme pleasure? Maybe it's a way of cementing a relationship. What makes sex so amazing is that it's all of those, and more.

We have special organs that are made to have sex; they fit together and have many nerve endings so as to make sex pleasurable. But sex is really a whole body experience, from your brain right down to your toes. And becoming a good sex partner means that you have to understand how to fit all those parts together. I explain the basics of the male parts in Chapter 2 and the female parts in Chapter 3. If you want to know how they fit together, turn to Chapter 10.

Every generation believes that it's the first one to have discovered the pleasures of sex, and yet none of us would be here if it weren't for the sex lives of the previous generation. Even if it's too much to imagine your parents and grandparents having sex, just give 'em a tip of the old hat.

You can have sex many different ways, and yet the outcome of sex, the satisfaction that comes from a sexual encounter, is the goal of each of them. (Of course, if your only aim is to make a baby, then the pleasurable aspects become secondary.) Part of the mystery of sex is why so many paths lead to this one end. Chapters 11, 12, 15, and 16 cover different ways you can achieve orgasms.

It's also true that some of us are attracted to the same sex, which means that making a baby isn't possible from engaging in sexual activity. That doesn't mean that the urge for a gay couple to have a baby isn't there, and luckily there are other means such as adoption or artificial insemination. Since most of my readers are heterosexual, much of what I have to say in this book is addressed to them, but I can't help but add that while science hasn't yet been able to answer many questions about different sexual orientations, each and every one of us deserves the same respect no matter our sexual preference.

# So Why Do We Have It?

Ultimately we have sex in order to keep the human race going and to participate in a very pleasurable activity. Throughout most of mankind's history, the two were almost always linked, but today they needn't be. Being able to have an orgasm without worrying about creating a baby has changed the nature of sex, though when the two are put back together, sex reaches its greatest potential.

## Making babies: A natural outcome

The English language is a rich one because it has borrowed heavily from so many different tongues. As a result, people use a variety of words to describe the same thing — especially if that thing involves sex. (I'm sure you're familiar with some of these words, but, being polite, I won't mention them.) What never ceases to amaze me, however, is how often people who engage in sexual intercourse forget that what they're doing is directly related to procreation, propagation, continuing the species, conception, pregnancy, **MAKING BABIES!**

Some unlucky couples must go through a great deal of trouble to have a family, and some can't manage to do it on their own at all, so they turn to medical science for help. But for most people, the process is relatively easy — at least until the baby actually arrives. The man needs only to place his erect penis into the woman's vagina and ejaculate. A baby may not result the first time — though it can, as many women have learned when losing their virginity — but eventually one of the man's sperm will unite with the woman's egg, and, voilà, a baby is conceived.

Because baby making can be so easy, many women find themselves pregnant without intending to be. So here's my first of many tips:



TIP

If you absolutely, positively don't want to make a baby, then don't have sexual intercourse — remain abstinent.

Yes, I know there are ways of preventing pregnancy from occurring — I talk about them in Chapter 7 — but none of these methods is foolproof. Believe it or not, in at least one recorded case, the man had a vasectomy, the woman had her tubes tied, and she still became pregnant. So remember, *the only method that works 100 percent of the time is abstinence.*

### The facts: Sperm and egg together

The process of making a baby has not changed since Adam and Eve discovered sex: A sperm from the man must meet an egg inside of the woman (test-tube babies notwithstanding). When the sperm and the egg unite, the egg becomes *fertilized*.

Both the sperm and the egg are very special cells; they have only half of the genetic material (*chromosomes*) that other cells have. All cells need chromosomes to provide the instructions on how to divide and create an individual.

Fertilization occurs when the chromosomes and genes from both the sperm and the egg combine to form one single cell, called a *zygote*. As a result, instead of an identical copy of one of the parents (a clone), fertilization creates a unique individual that shares features of both parents. So now you know the reason you have your father's nose and your mother's feet: At least once in their lives, your parents mingled their genetic material.

## TIMING THE UNION

Female humans differ from nearly all the rest of their sex in the animal kingdom because, rather than wanting sexual intercourse only when they can conceive (that is, when they're *in heat*), women can want sexual intercourse at any time (provided they don't have a headache). Despite this difference, female humans do share with other female mammals the trait that enables them to make a baby, or *conceive*, only at certain times — in most women's cases, from one to three days a month.



WARNING

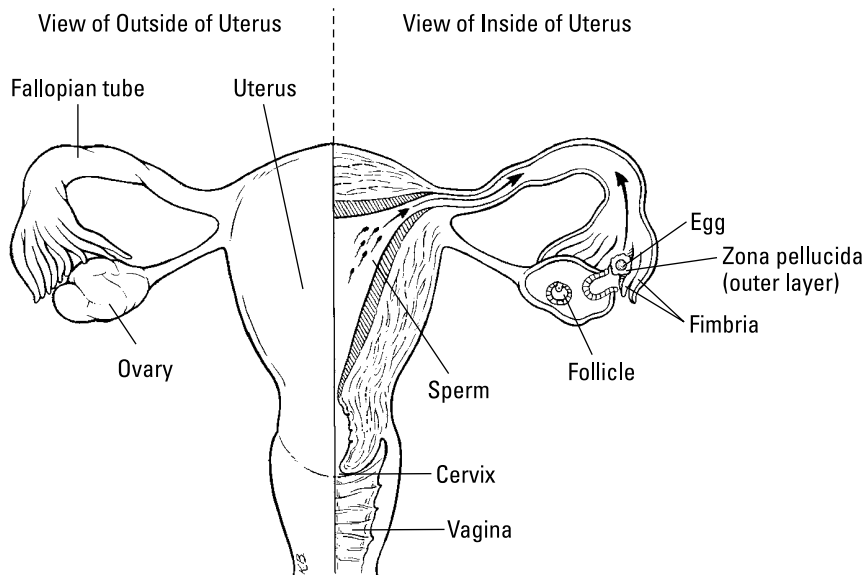
Just because a woman is fertile only a few days a month, don't assume that those are the only days that unprotected sexual intercourse can make her pregnant. A woman's reproductive organs are much more complicated than that, as I explain in Chapter 3.

Unlike a man, who continually makes sperm (more than 26 trillion a year!), a woman has all her eggs already inside her at birth. These eggs — about 200,000 of them — reside in a woman's two *ovaries* (see Figure 1-1). About every 28 days, a fluid-filled sac in the ovary, called a *follicle*, releases one of the eggs. When a follicle releases an egg, many women feel a dull ache, known as *mittelschmerz*, in the area around the ovary.



TIP

Becoming aware of when *mittelschmerz* occurs is a good point of reference for anyone practicing *natural family planning*. I talk more about family planning in Chapter 7.



**FIGURE 1-1:** The egg begins an incredible journey in search of a sperm to produce a child. No wonder sex has been called “making whoopee”!

Illustration by Kathryn Born