

Should you schedule sex? We looked at whether spontaneous or unplanned sex is more satisfying

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Portrayals of sex in TV and movies often involve passionate, spur-of-the-moment encounters that [seem to have little forethought or planning](#).

Media depictions of sex might then send the message that a feature of hot, fulfilling sex is spontaneity.

In fact, in our studies, when we asked partnered people in the United States and Canada about their [sexual preferences](#), most believe that [sex is more satisfying when it happens spontaneously compared to when it is planned ahead of time](#).

Myths of spontaneity

But is spur-of-the moment sex actually more satisfying? Although spontaneity might signal passion to some, valuing spontaneity can have its drawbacks. Although desire for sex can be intense in the throes of a new relationship and sex might feel like it regularly occurs without planning, [sexual desire](#) (and the frequency of sex) often declines over time in a relationship.

Long-term couples who wait for both partners to have a simultaneous burst of desire in order for sex to occur might rarely engage in sex. Planning might be essential for sex to occur amid the other demands on their time, even if scheduling a [sexual encounter](#) is seen as less sexy. Knowing when to have sex can also help people prepare—clothing, lubrication, privacy—that might enhance sex.

Despite the spontaneity ideal permeating North American culture, psyche and media, little research had examined how planned sex stacked up against the spontaneous sex ideal.

Our research group from the [Sexual Health and Relationships Laboratory at York University](#) recruited 303 individuals and 102 couples from the United States and Canada. We asked participants how much they agreed with statements like: "Sex with my partner is most satisfying when it happens spontaneously" and "I prefer to know in advance when I

will be having sex next."

We then asked whether their most recent sexual experience was planned or not. We inquired how sexually satisfied they were in their relationships generally and during their most recent sexual experience. We also tracked their daily experiences over a three-week period.

Spontaneity and satisfaction

Across both studies, people upheld the belief that spontaneity was ideal. But in contrast to these beliefs, spontaneous sex was not especially satisfying.

In our first study, although people who were more strongly aligned with the spontaneity ideal generally reported being more sexually satisfied, when their most recent sexual experience was seen as having happened spontaneously, they did not find it more satisfying than sex that was planned.

Planned sex could sometimes be seen as less sexy, but this was only for those who believed that planned sex is not ideal. Perceiving a recent sexual experience as planned was linked to lower sexual satisfaction overall, but this was not the case for those who more strongly believed that planned sex was satisfying (and interestingly, about one in five mentioned their last sexual encounter was planned).

In a second study, in which we tracked couples' sexual experiences over 21 days, sexual satisfaction did not differ based on whether sex was perceived as spontaneous or planned, even for those who believed in the spontaneous sex ideal.

We also wanted to get a glimpse of how people felt spontaneity and planning contributed to their sexual enjoyment. Interestingly, people did

say that spontaneity added to their sexual excitement, passion, meaning and desire. But many people also mentioned that planning could create anticipation and desire for sex.

And though some people mentioned that planned sex could add an element of pressure, spontaneity was also not always the recipe for hot sex—some people said that when sex was unplanned, they may not have enough time to warm up to penetration, set aside mental distractions or ensure privacy.

Passionate perceptions

One reason that people may value spontaneity is because they link it to more authentic passion and desire, akin to the early stages of a relationship. If this is you, remember that even in the early stages of a relationship, sex was probably more planned than you perceived it to be.

Just think of how much planning went into creating romantic or fun dates, preparing for sex ahead of time with personal grooming or appealing undergarments, and making efforts to turn toward each other in those early days of your relationship.

Planned sex, on the other hand, may evoke anti-erotic associations of responsibility, duty and obligation which, let's face it, is not the stuff of great romance novels.

Yet our research shows that seeing the value of planned sex might help couples maintain sexual satisfaction by being intentional about sex. This is especially important to remember when [romantic partners](#) go through periods where spontaneity is a challenge, such as busy periods at work and the birth of a new child.

Being intentional about sex

Clinicians seeing couples who are struggling with their sexual connection have long tried to [challenge ideas about sexual spontaneity](#) in favor of having clients be more intentional about their sexual [relationship](#).

Most of the important things we do in our lives are planned ahead of time. For example, recall your last vacation. Chances are the trip was something that you planned ahead of time, but also something that was highly enjoyable.

If sex is something you and your partner(s) value, planning can be a part of prioritizing sexual connection. While the stars can sometimes align and spark spur-of-the-moment passion, being intentional by planning time for sex can also set the stage for fulfilling sexual encounters.

Planning sex does not mean it has to be penciled in on a schedule or sent out as a calendar invite. It can simply be about communicating with your partner so you can learn when the mood is more likely to strike, such as after sharing emotional intimacy or during less stressful periods at work, and agreeing to make time for connection.

With many people still working from home or remotely, this may be as simple as shifting your work hours so you can enjoy an afternoon delight. In some cases, you or your partner may be more interested in having sex in the morning or afternoon versus at night when you are ready for sleep after a heavy dinner.

For most couples, sex is a way to maintain and strengthen their connection. And over time in relationships, just like date nights or weekend getaways, it is something that might require planning. The good news is that planned sex is just as likely to be satisfying as a spur-of-the-moment encounter.

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