

Be specific. Don't say "I want more affection." Say "I want you to hug me and give me a special kiss when we first get together after work. I want to hold your hand when we go for a walk or sit side by side. And I want to be held for a little while each night without that always being interpreted as a sexual invitation."

Have sexual "heart talks." Consider taking turns sharing your innermost feelings and thoughts on one or two of the following sexual "heart talks." Be careful not to interrupt, and give your undivided attention. Be specific, caring, open and honest:

1. The best thing about our sex life is . . .
2. My father gave me the impression that sex . . .
3. My mother gave me the impression that sex . . .
4. What I find most sexually attractive about you is . . .
5. What I would like to add to our sexual and physical intimacy is . . .
7. I turn on to you most when . . .
8. It would be easier to express my sexual desires if . . .
9. I think our experience of sexual pleasure is . . .
10. A sexual delight I would like to indulge you in is . . .

Create a wish list. Over a week or two, you and your partner write down everything you wish the other would do for you sexually, from more cuddling, hugs and kisses to affectionate notes to specific intimate caresses. Next, rank your wishes in order from "easiest to ask for" to "the most difficult." Then, once or twice a month, you each reveal the "easiest" items on your lists and eventually work your way down to the more difficult requests. One ground rule: You both have the right to say no whenever you're uncomfortable with a request.

For most people, the sexual wishes that are easiest to request are also easiest to grant. Typically, they have to do with expressions of affection out of bed: hugs, kisses and light caresses in everyday situations. The combination of asking for affection and getting it can have a surprisingly positive impact on the relationship as a whole.