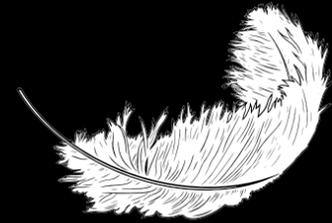


THE PARKINSEX BOOK



get it on

These items can help put the intimacy strategies suggested in ParkinSex into practice. Look for ways to use them throughout this book.



A Feather



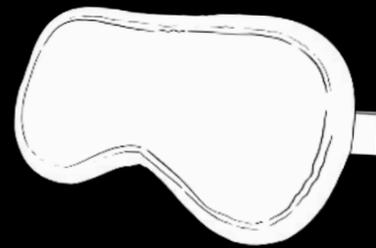
Massage Oil



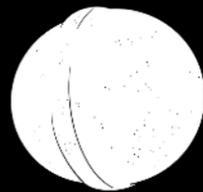
Scented Candle



Touch Stones



A Blindfold



Bath Bomb

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Medical disclaimer: Any medical information provided is solely for the purpose of providing information and is not intended as medical advice. You should always talk to your personal healthcare providers for specific medical and health-related instructions and guidelines.

Please remember to practice safe sex as appropriate to your circumstances. For some, medication increases sexual desire to a point where partners are not on the same page. Communication is important; however, it may also be helpful to have a discussion with your healthcare provider.

Forward

By Dr. Sheila Silver

I have traveled all over the world speaking to people with Parkinson's disease and their partners on the topic of cultivating emotional and physical intimacy.

I have also spoken to hundreds of couples in my private practice as a clinical sexologist about how to expand their definition of sex. We all encounter health challenges, work stress, family issues, and general fatigue in our lives. Because of this, I believe all couples need to think about “sex” in broader terms for those occasions when our bodies or emotional headspace aren't aligned with having sex in our typical way.

However, people with Parkinson's disease (PD) and their partners need to be even more flexible in how they think about sex. They can benefit from tools when their wants, or their partner's, might be beyond what they can bring.

Being sensitive to the realities of their changing body and abilities, and how that evolves day to day, can help people with Parkinson's think more in terms of “What sounds good and pleasurable to me? What will help me feel more connected to my partner?” This booklet is a guide for that exploration.

So often, we think about “sex” in terms of how it used to be for us or how we think it's supposed to be. What I know is that the more narrow our definition of “sex” is, the harder it is to maintain this important connection as we face the challenges of managing the symptoms of Parkinson's.

Keeping emotional and physical intimacy alive in the face of a chronic disease is no easy task, so I was thrilled when the American Parkinson Disease Association approached me about writing this forward. Their idea to create a booklet with tools for restarting, redefining, and reimagining sexuality for couples aligns with my own clinical perspective. Having collaborated with them on this project, I have been impressed with the time and thought that has gone into creating a resource to deepen sensuality and sexuality for any person with PD and their partner.

This booklet will empower those who have allowed intimacy to fade and inspire those who are looking for new ideas.

As humans, we all need touch. My hope is that, as a person with Parkinson's, you frequently create a bubble of time with your partner and use this incredible resource to create experiences that are pleasurable and connecting for the two of you. Creativity is your friend!

Dr. Sheila Silver

MA, DHS, ACS, Clinical Sexologist (she/her)

Chapter 1

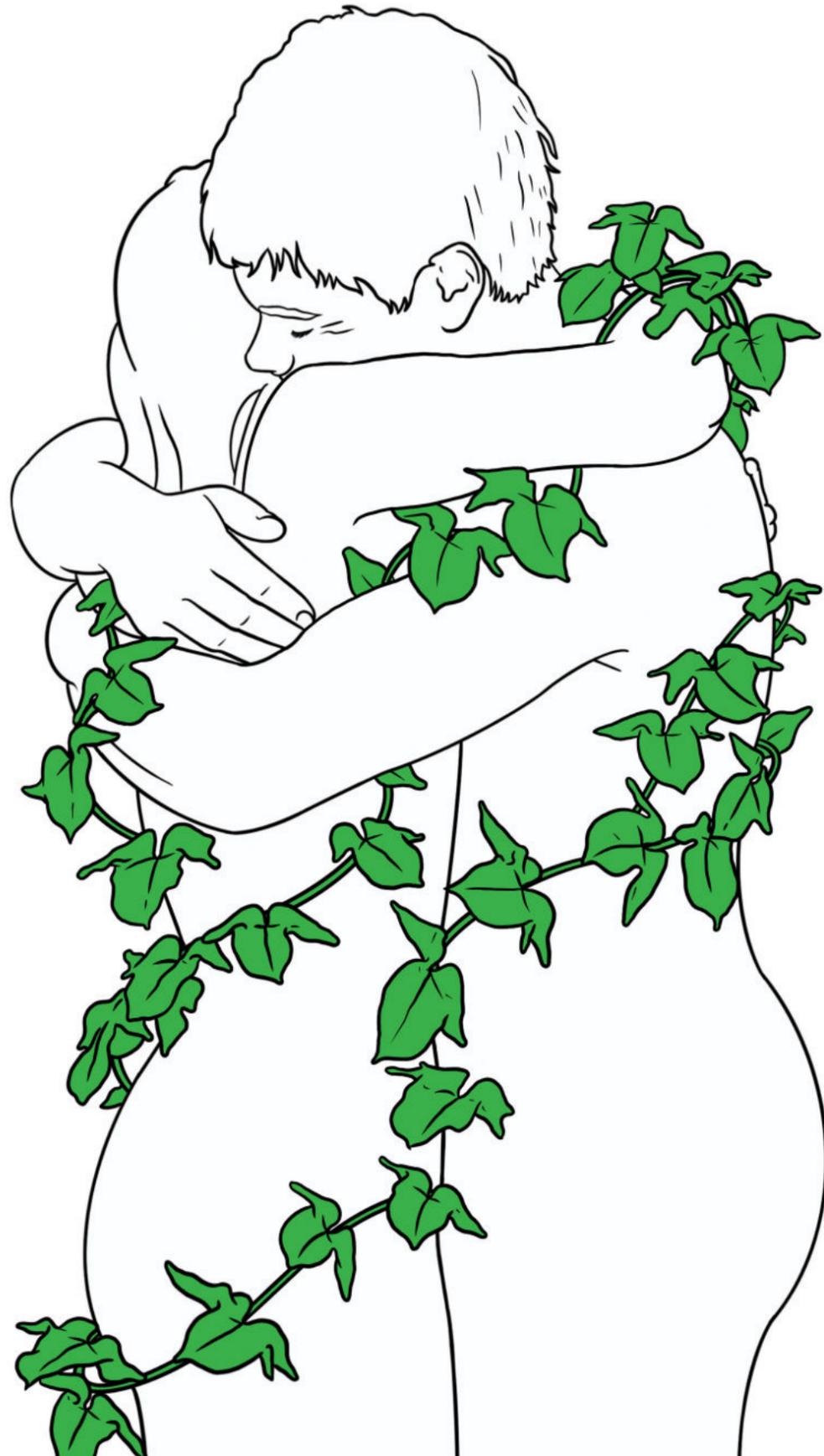
Time to get *sexy*



Intimacy doesn't
always happen spontaneously.
A little planning helps.

But if you're waiting for the perfect time, here's a hint: There is no perfect time. This may be especially true when one partner is living with Parkinson's disease. However, studies show that intimacy positively affects health and happiness. So, for couples managing Parkinson's disease, making time to connect can have profound benefits.





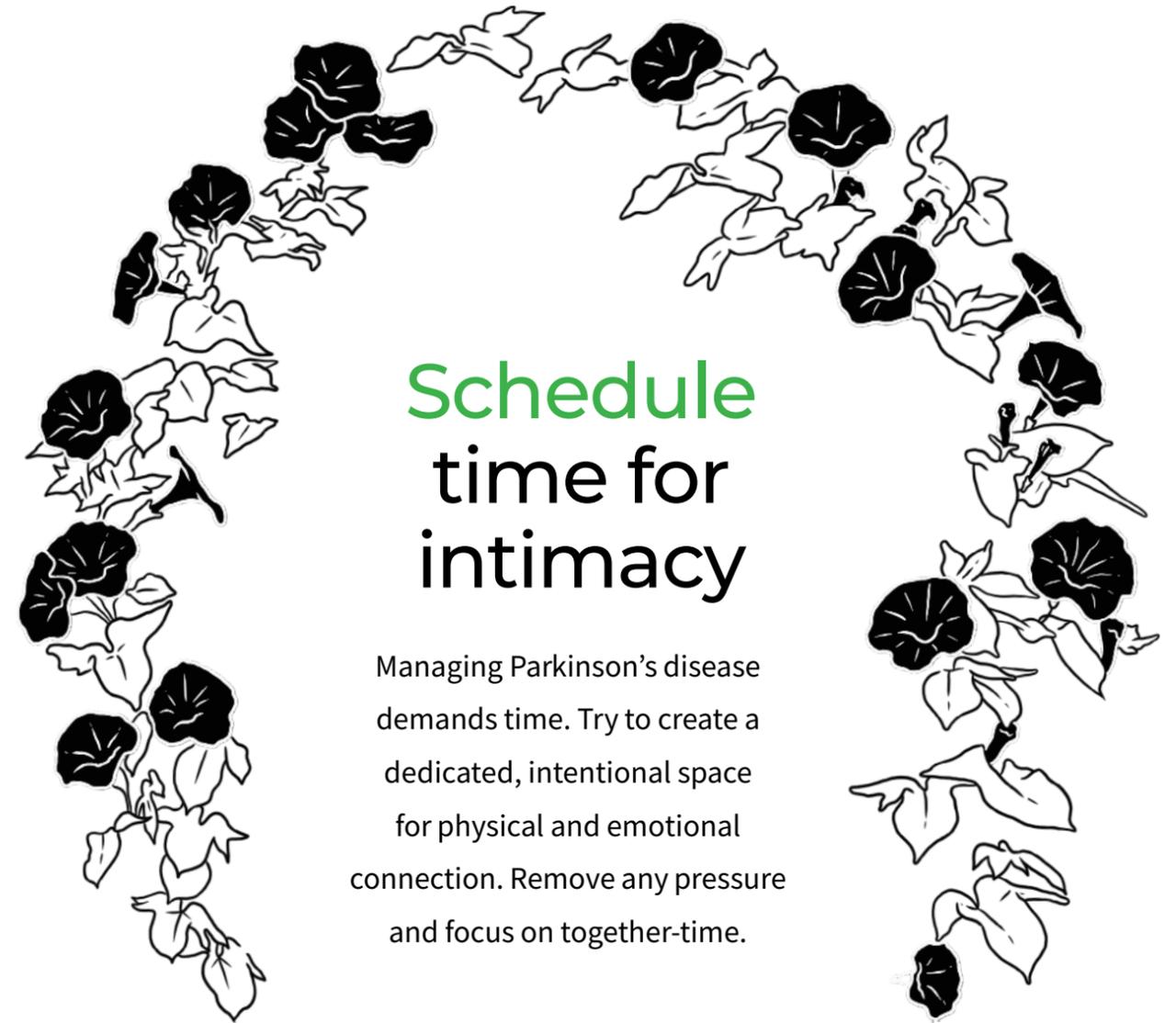
Scheduling time for intimacy will help you get started. You may not always be in sync with one another, so take it slowly. Acknowledge the challenges you may have to navigate. Motor issues, non-motor symptoms, and medication may limit your options for intimacy, and you may feel robbed of the ability to be sexual in ways that used to be more natural for you. This booklet will show you how planning, practice, and commitment can make intimacy more accessible.

Recognize that not every plan goes as planned. Communication is key. If events change and the timing isn't right, reschedule. If an opportunity arises, take advantage of those "on" times.

A plan is simply a commitment to do your best. Be patient with each other.

When it is time for intimacy, it doesn't always have to be transcendent. Simple acts of touching can trigger complex benefits by turning on those pleasure centers in our brains and releasing feel-good hormones like dopamine. With a little planning, intimacy may become self-fulfilling and even spontaneous.

More touch leads to more pleasure, which leads to deeper connection.



Schedule time for intimacy

Managing Parkinson's disease demands time. Try to create a dedicated, intentional space for physical and emotional connection. Remove any pressure and focus on together-time.

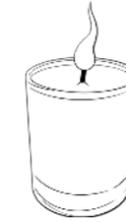
Chapter 2

The comfort zone

Creating a safe space to connect begins
by setting the right tone.

A positive atmosphere can help you and your partner relax as you begin to explore intimacy. For a couple living with Parkinson's disease, the emotional space is as important as the physical space. A conversation about expectations and how you want to share this time will lead to a better experience. Put a pause on responsibilities and silence your phones. Listening to each other will immediately start to deepen your connection.





Establish a relaxing environment to stimulate the senses by playing **music**, lowering the lights, or lighting a **candle**. Make sure the temperature in the room is comfortable.

You may start feeling positive waves of emotion just from being in the right kind of space together.

Music is a shortcut to emotion. It triggers pleasurable memories, helps manage stress, and even builds excitement. When you listen to a favorite song, the areas of the brain that produce those feel-good hormones light up. Explore how music makes you and your partner feel. Experiment with different rhythms to find what helps you sync up emotionally and physically.

Aromatherapy is another accessible strategy to help create a positive mood, as smell is one of our most evocative senses. While some people with Parkinson's disease have a decreased sense of smell, aromatherapy may still be enjoyable to a partner. And you can both share the beautiful, romantic light. A **candle** can be a symbol that separates intimate time from the rest of the day.

There are always pressing issues, but don't let them get in the way of creating space for intimacy. Instead, try setting aside time, establishing a comfortable place, and putting a "pause" on anything that might distract you from connecting with each other.

When you think about your comfort zone, what comes to mind?

Where do you feel most at ease? What time of day is it?

What music is playing? What does your partner think of as their comfort zone?



Music is a
shortcut to
emotion

Create a playlist to share with your partner and see where it leads. Try slow dancing in the living room or just lying down together.

Chapter 3

Turn on the touching



Deepen intimacy through
non-sexual, physical contact.

Touching can be exciting, fun, and adapted to meet the needs of a partner living with Parkinson's disease. If you want to deepen intimacy, turn on the touch.

Simple strategies can help you get started. First, it's okay to acknowledge that motor symptoms can feel like a barrier to connecting with your partner. While Parkinson's disease may impact how and when you connect, physical connection can be strengthened by amplifying the capabilities of each partner.





Try taking turns being the “giver” and the “receiver.” The receiver asks for the type of touch they want, and the giver learns what their partner likes. This kind of one-directional touch gives a couple with different abilities and energy an equal opportunity to adjust to what stimulates their partner. You may each have a role you prefer, and perhaps that role changes when it is an “on” or “off” time of day.

Play to the strengths in your own dynamic.

A **feather** is one of the most accessible ways to introduce and explore different sensations that can deepen intimacy. For someone with Parkinson’s, a feather can neutralize tremor with a forgiving and gentle touch. Take turns and see what feels good. Watch out—it may tickle. But it will also inspire you both to slow down, be in the moment, and explore.

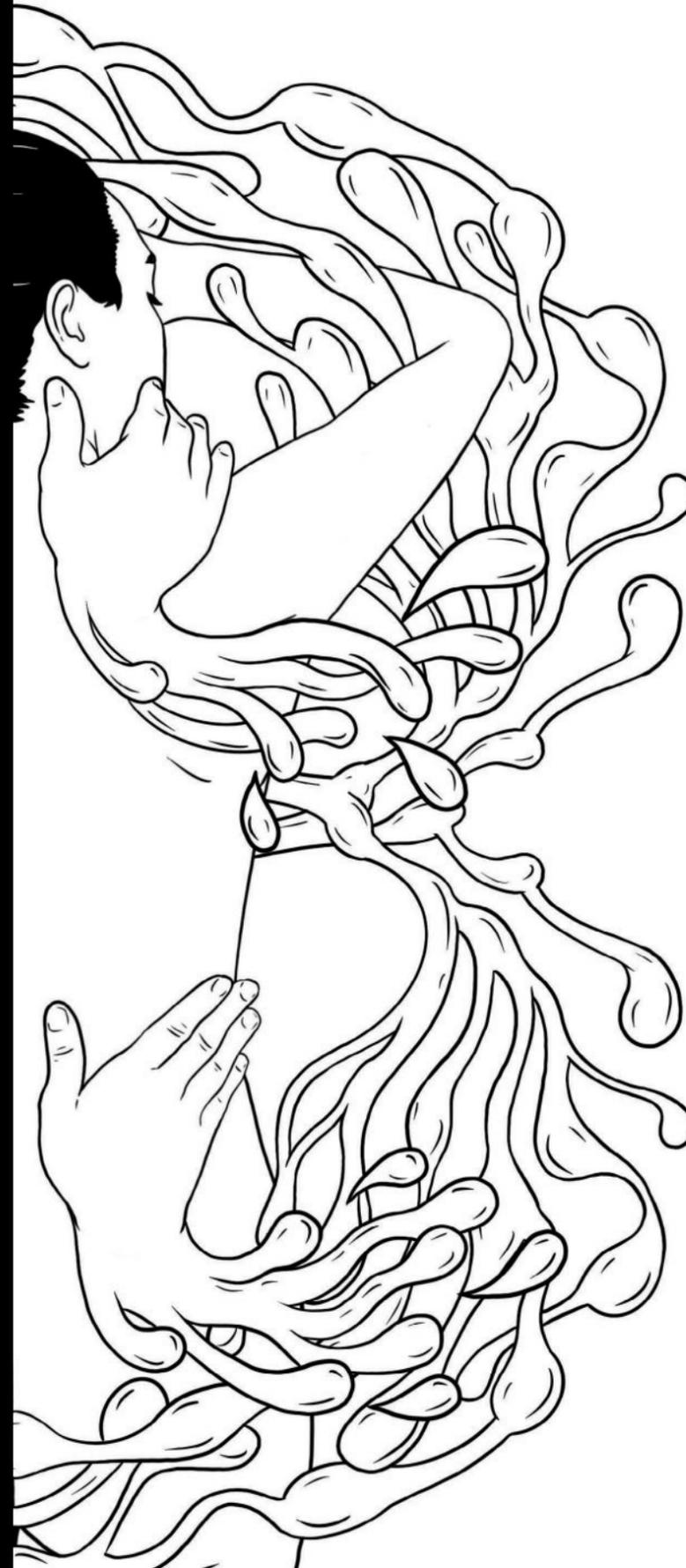
Sensual touching is also a fulfilling way to practice intimacy.

The benefits have long been recognized for people with Parkinson's disease. A simple way to get started is to use a smooth river stone. The sensation provides a contrast to the feather but similarly deepens intimacy. Once you get comfortable exploring touch, you may not want to stop.



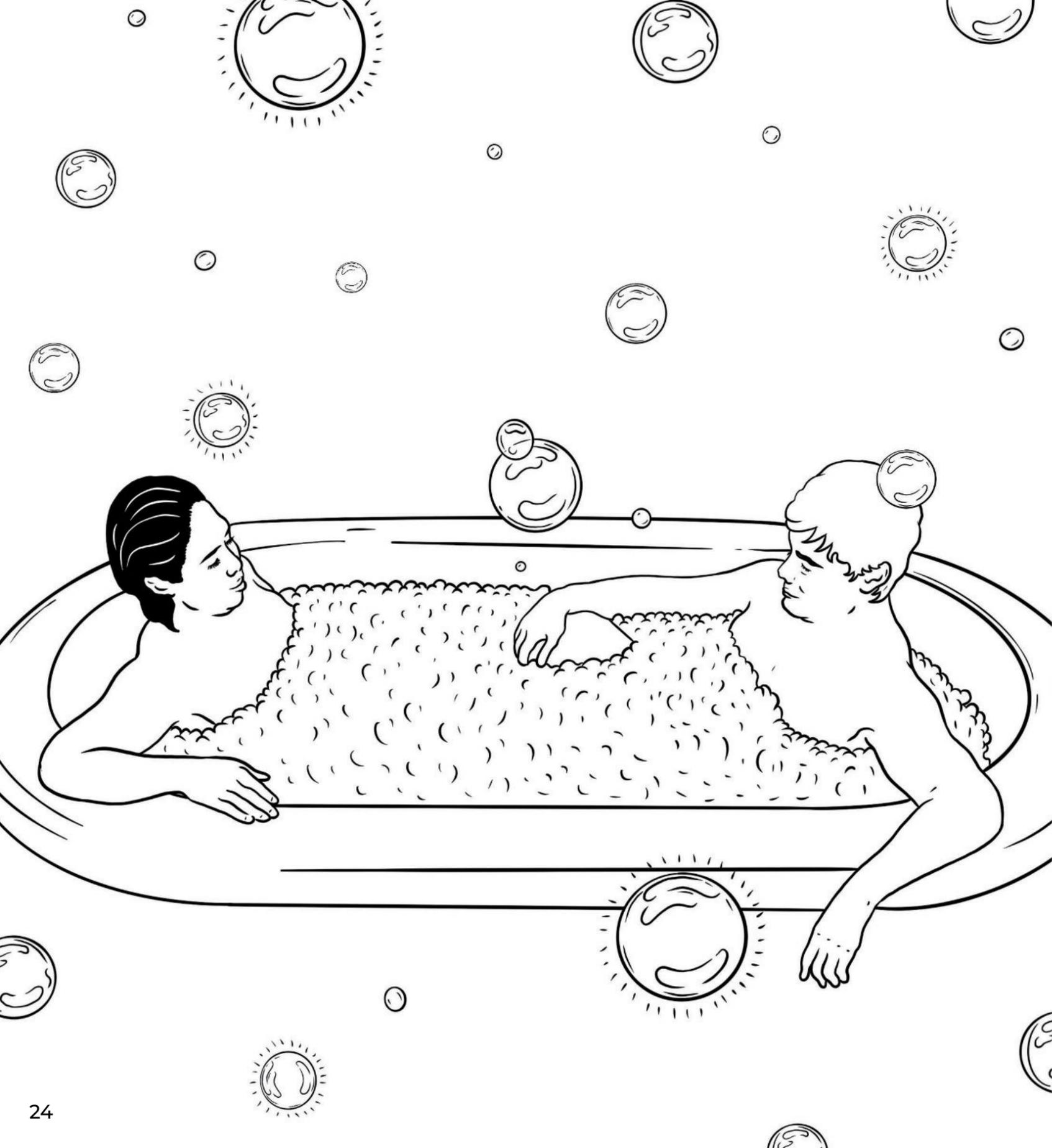
How to use smooth river stones to deepen intimacy.

With the stone in hand, gently apply pressure anywhere on your partner's body. Press and knead the stone gently with your fingertips, or simply trace the stone along your partner's skin.



Sensual touch: more than pleasurable

Massage oil reduces friction, making the health benefits of sensual touch even more enjoyable. It inspires intimacy while reducing stress, increasing blood flow, and relieving the muscle stiffness and pain that comes with Parkinson's disease.



Warm up in the bathtub

Using a **bath bomb** together in the tub can inspire touch, intimacy, and the feeling of reconnecting with your partner.



No judgments, no scorecards



If you're feeling self-conscious,
you're literally not alone.

Your partner may also feel that way. It's natural for couples to have some degree of inhibition. Parkinson's disease may increase your feelings of hesitancy because of movement symptoms or other limitations. These feelings may also cause a partner to hold back so they won't cause embarrassment. Discuss these feelings, get them out in the open, and you can start to reduce inhibitions.



Trust-building exercises can be a playful way to help reduce inhibitions. These exercises are accessible to couples managing Parkinson's disease and can help create a safe space to have a vulnerable conversation.

Just bring what you can in the moment.

If what you're doing makes you feel good, and makes you both feel connected, focus on that to overcome feelings of self-consciousness.

Remember, feeling self-conscious is only natural. Parkinson's disease may accentuate those feelings, but trust exercises can help reduce emotional barriers to the health and wellness benefits of intimacy.

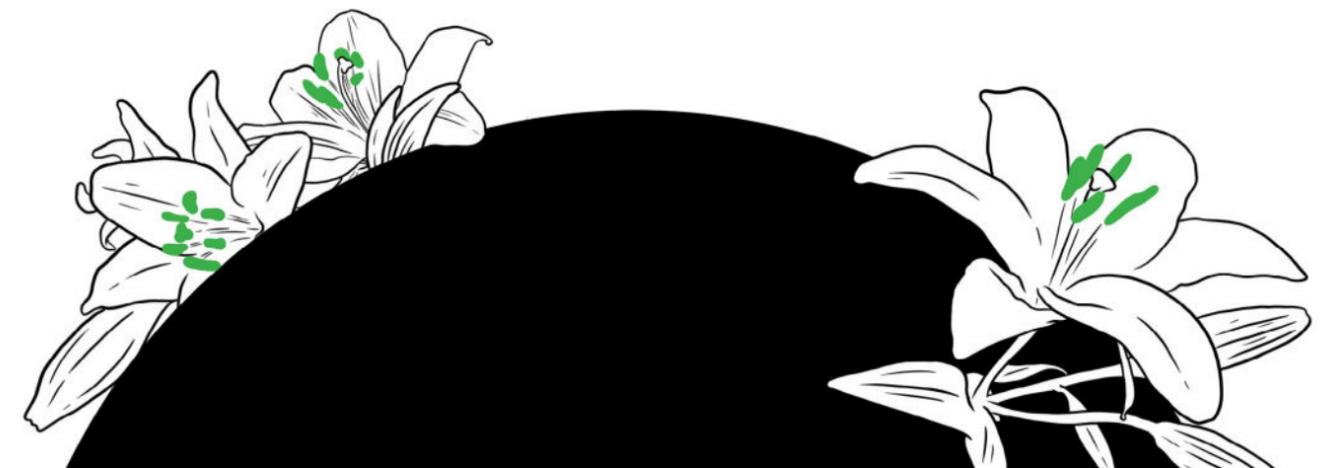
It's simple to get sensual. These activities can help you build trust and reduce inhibitions.

Talk for a minute about anything while the other person remains silent. Switch.

Stare into each other's eyes for 30 seconds without looking away. Build to 3 minutes.

Turn the lights off, hold hands, and just practice being comfortable with each other.

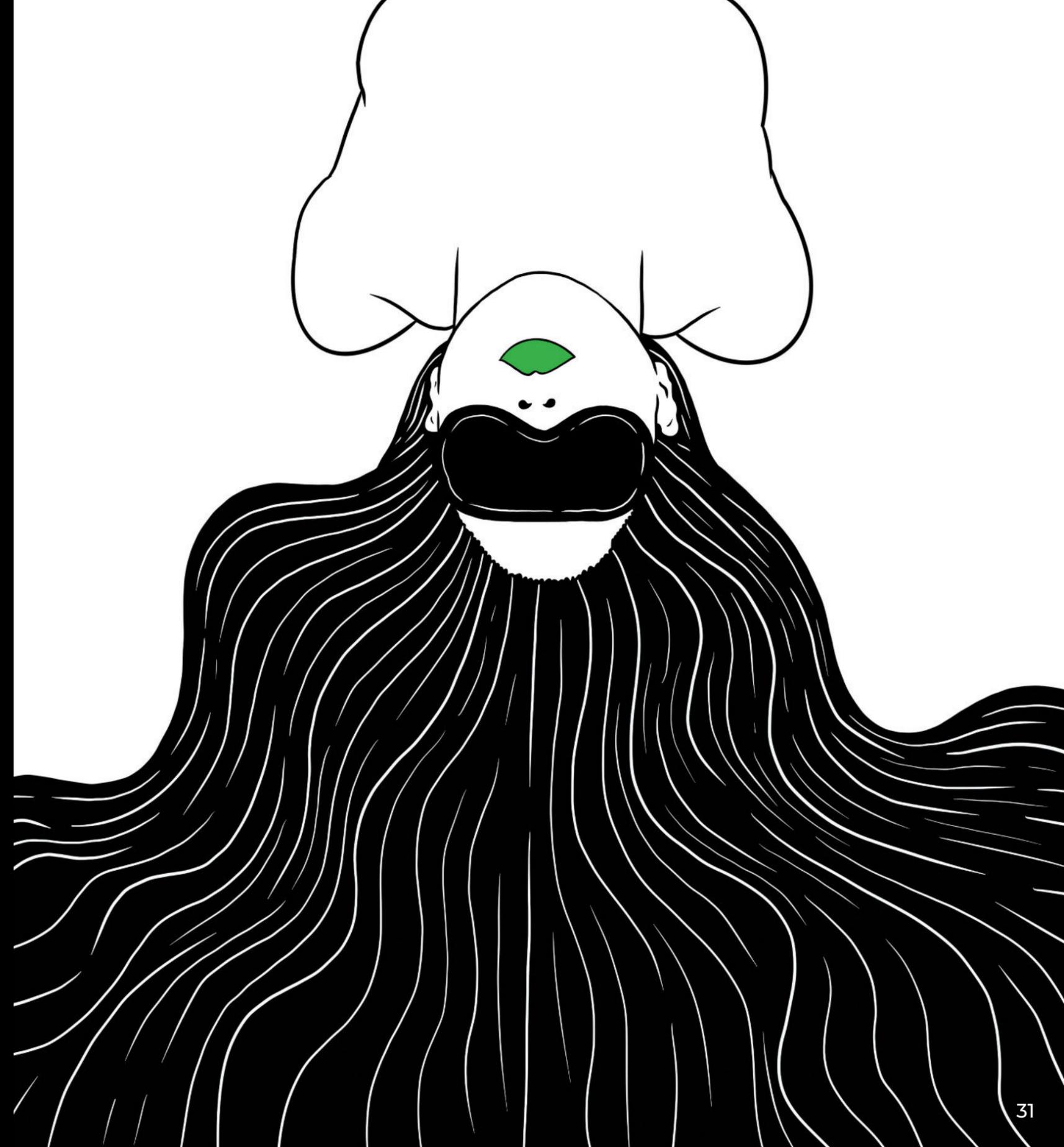
Blindfold your partner to reduce self-awareness.
Touch them to increase trust.

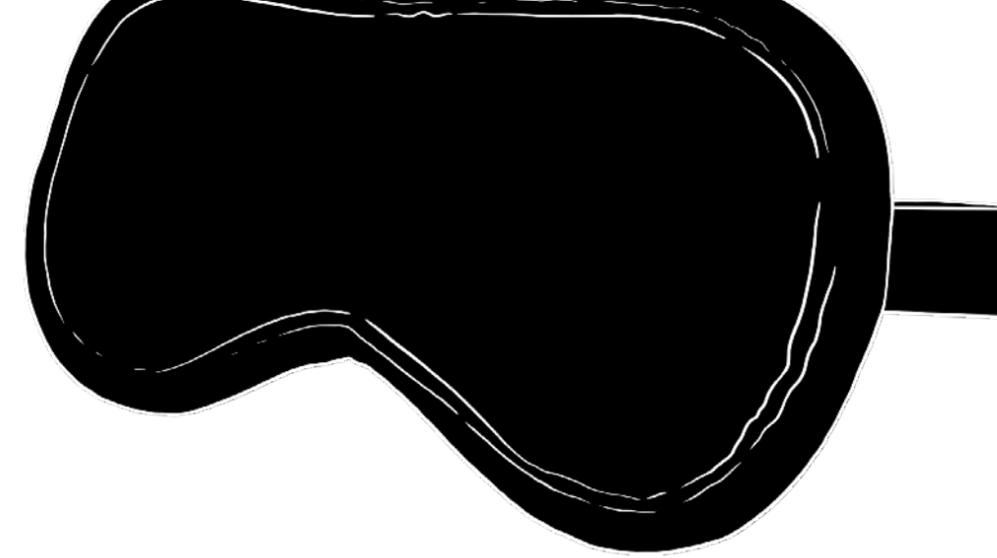
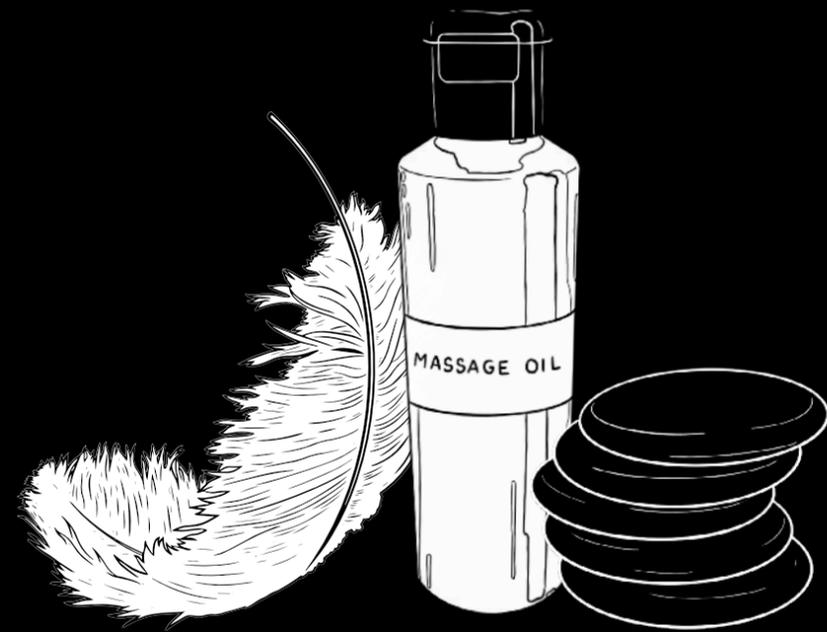


A blindfold is one way to reduce inhibitions.

Before trying one on, discuss it with your partner to make sure it's relaxing and not anxiety provoking.

Wearing a blindfold can bring a sense of calm while heightening your senses of touch, smell, sound, and taste. Explore **music** and gentle whispers in the ear. Experiment with a **feather** or **smooth river stones**. If you like scents, perfume or aftershave can be a powerful stimulant.





You may know how to put on a **blindfold**.

But do you know how to **use it**?

Take turns. You both may have inhibitions to overcome.

Be careful, as blindfolds make you, well, blind.

Practice your comfort for touching and being touched
using a **feather**, **smooth river stones**, or **massage oil**.

Be patient, relax, and focus on connection rather than barriers.

Adventure land

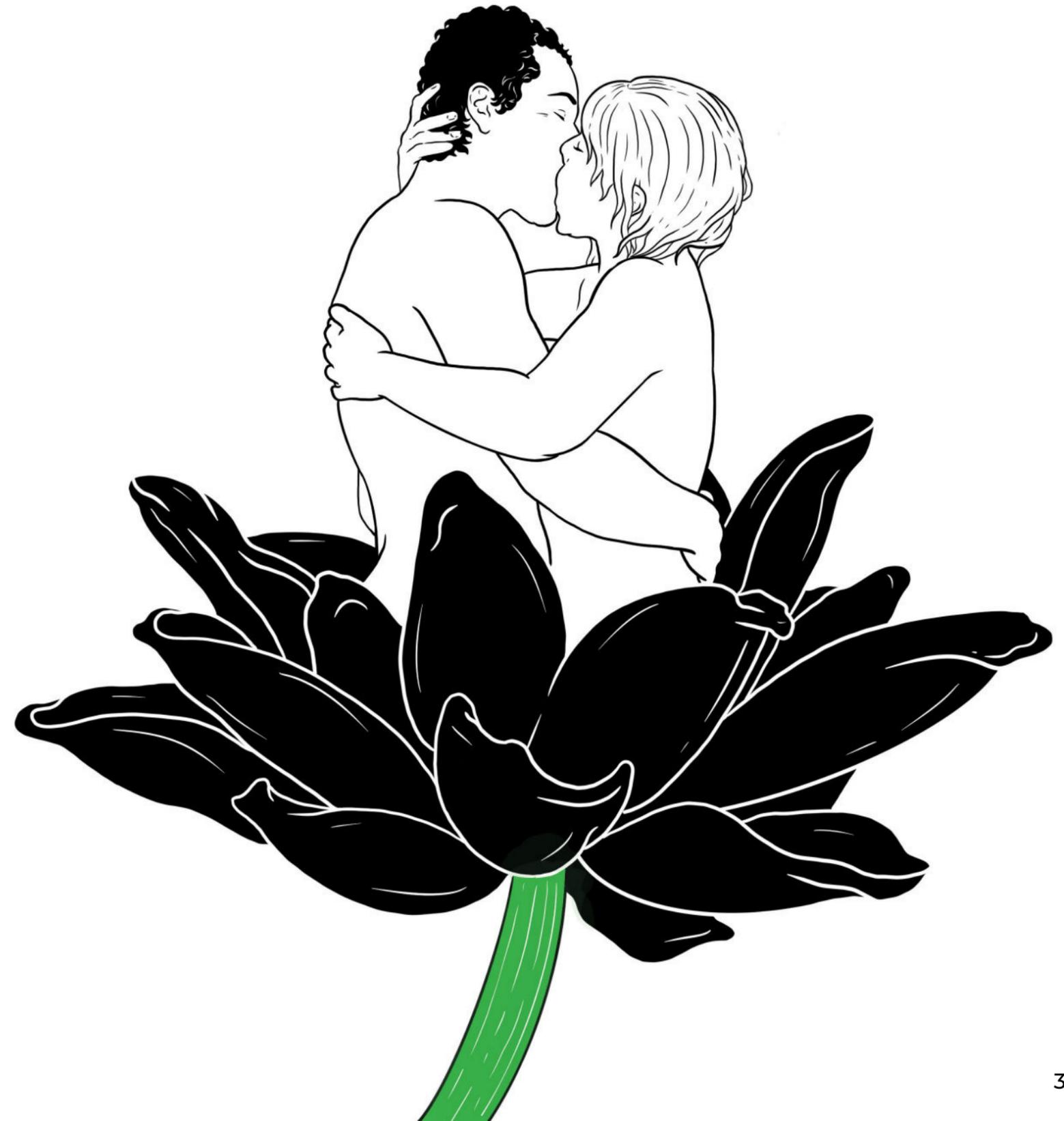


Sexual intimacy presents
challenges for couples
managing Parkinson's disease.

But it's worth it.

Studies clearly show positive health benefits.

Amplifying capabilities while working around obstacles can
be a successful strategy. Begin by embarking on a pleasurable
journey rather than making the destination your goal.





A starting point could be discussing your desires and capabilities as a couple. It's okay if your capabilities change during the day. Give each other permission to revise the plan and the latitude to "practice" fulfilling each other's desires.

**Consider this principle:
Sex and intimacy are
meaningful acts of pleasure
with your partner.**

Note that there is no endgame or finish line included in that definition. It's only about spending time together and pleasing each other in whatever way the moment inspires.

In fact, sex therapists often give positive reasons to explore acts of intimacy without the pressure of achieving goals like orgasm. Simply having more sensual experiences together will help intensify how you experience intimacy. And it will feel pretty good, too. Any way you can stimulate your brain's pleasure centers as a couple will release dopamine and contribute to your feelings of wellness.

Ultimately, the only thing that matters is how you and your partner define what constitutes a loving and healthy relationship.

Now is a good time to discuss
what worked best

Let your partner know what you liked and why you liked it. (And if you happen to be blindfolded while talking, you're a quick learner.) Take time to discuss what you want to continue practicing together.

get it on

Thank you to all the people who supported and contributed to the creation of this important project: our partners and collaborators Heather Waldman and Jeff Butchen, Matt Eagles and Vivian Eagles, Allison Toepperwein-Eury and Steven Eury; Dr. Sheila Silver, clinical sexologist; Xaviera Lopez, illustrator; and dozens of other couples, care partners, and individuals in the Parkinson's community who helped make ParkinSex happen.

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