

THE FIRST CONVERSATION

The Conversation You've Been Avoiding

How to tell him what's been happening, without it landing as one more no.

You've never had the words for what happens in your body when he moves toward you, so you've said nothing, and he has heard that as no. This is how to open it. Not to fix it. To say one true thing.

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PSYCHOTHERAPY-INFORMED COACHING

What he's been carrying

He's felt it for a long time. The moments you go completely still when he moves toward you. The evenings you keep yourself busy. The yes to intimacy where you weren't really there. Maybe he stopped asking, and you might have read that as relief. It isn't. This is a man who has learned that asking hurts.

Here's what he's carrying, and what he's probably never said out loud:

- **Rejection**, often for years.
- **The anger** he feels about the rejection.
- **The guilt** he feels about the anger, because some part of him knows you aren't choosing this.

My husband told me, years after we came through it, that for a long time he felt like I just didn't like him. Like I hated him, even. I didn't. My body did something before I had a say in it, and I had no words for that, so I said nothing. Nothing is what he heard.

That's the trap. You don't have the words, so you stay quiet. He reads the quiet as one more no. And the distance starts to move out of the bedroom and into every other area of your life.

What this conversation is for

It's not to solve it, and it's not to explain the science. Its job is small, and it's more than enough: **say one true thing about what happens in your body, and tell him it isn't about him.** That's the first conversation. Everything else comes later.

When. In daylight. On a walk, or over coffee on a Saturday. Never in bed, and never right after you've said no. He needs to hear it when nothing is being asked of either of you.

How to open it

Borrow these until your own words come. Say the one that's most true.

"I've been pulling away from you, and I know you've felt it. It isn't about you. I've never known how to say that, so I'm saying it now."

"Something happens in my body when you move toward me, before I've had a single thought. I've never had words for it. I'm learning them, and I wanted you to hear that from me first."

"I found someone who describes exactly what happens to me. It has a name. It's called intimacy shutdown. I don't need you to fix it. I need you to know it isn't you."

What he might say, and what to say back

IS IT ME?	No. My body learned this long before you. You're the reason I want to change it.
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WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?	Because I didn't understand it either. I still don't completely.
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SILENCE, OR ANGER	You don't have to say anything tonight. I'm not going anywhere.
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Three things not to do

Don't promise a timeline. Don't explain the whole thing. Don't have this conversation on a night you've already pulled away.

One thing to agree on before it ends

"The next time my body needs a pause, I'm going to say *I need a minute*. Will you say *Take it, I'm here*, and stay?" That one exchange, agreed in daylight, is the first thing the two of you get to practice together.