

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy sexual pleasure, and protection

Baseball or Pizza? A New Way to Talk about Sex

If you have a conversation with someone in the US about sexual activity, it's likely you'll soon find that you're not just talking about sexual activity; you're also talking about baseball.



For example:

- You can be a “pitcher” or a “catcher” depending on whether you perform or receive a sexual activity.
- “Bases” refer to specific sexual acts performed in a strict order.
- You can “score” or “hit a home run”, which usually refers to having vaginal intercourse to the point of orgasm...at least for a man.
- When you “strike out,” you don’t get to have any sexual activity.
- A “bench warmer” is a virgin or someone who, for any number of reasons – their age, their ability, their skill level – isn’t “in the game”.
- A “bat” is a penis and a “nappy dugout” is a vulva or vagina.
- A “glove” or a “catcher’s mitt” is a way to refer to a condom
- A “switch hitter” is a bisexual person.
- We gay and lesbian folks “play for the other team”
- “If there’s grass on the field, play ball” means if a young person (usually a young woman) has pubic hair, she’s old enough to have sex with.

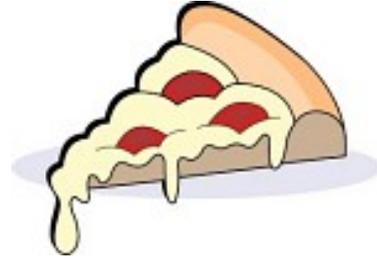
The baseball model is sexist, heterosexist, goal-directed, and competitive. A healthier model for adults in mid- and later life is based on pizza! To see the differences in the baseball and pizza models let’s compare three areas: the trigger for sexual activity, what happens during sexual activity, and the expected outcomes of sexual activity.

When do you play baseball? During baseball season or when there’s a game scheduled. It’s not always your choice when to play; there’s an external expectation that it’s game time. You can’t say, “I’m not feeling it today, coach. Think I’ll sit this one out.” On some occasions, like after a date, you or your partner may simply expect that it’s time to “batter up!”

When you get together to play a game of baseball there are opposing teams, offense and defense – someone is trying to move farther into the field (that usually gets assigned to a man) and someone is trying to prevent that movement (usually a woman). In baseball, people play against each other, not with each other, i.e., the encounter is competitive.

And when it's time for baseball, no one needs to talk about what's going to happen – everyone knows the rules and should just play the game. You don't get to discuss beforehand any of the things that would make baseball better for you. You just get into your assigned position and play.

Now think about pizza for a second. *When* do you have pizza? Well, it starts from an internal desire, a hunger, a need. "Huh, I could go for some pizza." And since it starts with an internal state it's one we have some level of control over. You can recognize you're hungry, but also know that it's not a great time to eat.



When you and a partner get together for pizza, you're not competing – you're in it to enjoy the experience together. There's no offense and defense in pizza. When you share pizza with someone, one of the things you have to do beforehand is talk about it – talk about what you want, talk about what you like – maybe even negotiate so that you both can be satisfied. "Well, I'm not crazy about mushrooms, but I like pepperoni – how about half and half?" Even if you've been having pizza with someone for a long time, you still have a check in – "Should we get the usual, or try something more adventurous?"

In terms of what happens during sexual activity, baseball is very rule-bound. You have to go around the bases in the right order, and score as many runs as you can. You can't hit the ball and run into right field, or get to second base and say, "Hmm, I'm good here. I think I'll just hang out here." That doesn't work. In baseball, everyone has a set position and is expected to play their part. You can't vary too much from those positions. And baseball requires a skill set that not everyone may naturally have or be able to achieve. Not everyone can play baseball, even if they might want to.

But think about eating pizza with someone: The experience is based on what we like, our personal preferences, what satisfies us. There are a million different kinds of pizza, a host of possible toppings, and a variety of different ways to eat pizza and none of them are wrong; they're different, and in this case different is good because it makes it a more satisfying experience for us.

Lastly, think about the goal of playing baseball. There's no doubt that it's play to win: The goal is to score as many runs as you can and win the game. There's always a winner in baseball, and that means there's also always a loser.

But what's the goal of eating pizza? If there is any goal of eating pizza, it's to feel satisfied, and that can be done with a slice, or more – it can differ over different activities, people, and times. Don't eat enough, and you don't feel satisfied; eat too much, and you feel kind of gross.

The baseball model has lots of commands and rules that come from an outside source. But the phrases associated with the pizza model are all questions – and who asks and answers those questions? You and your partner. And your choices and preferences matter.

When it comes to sexuality, think, "Baseball, you're out!" And get ready to dig into some pizza as a way to enjoy healthy sexual activity.

About the Author: Al Vernacchio, MsEd, is a sexuality educator at Friends Central School. His work was featured in the 11-20-11 New York Times Magazine article, "Teaching Good Sex. This FAQ is adapted from Al's TED TALK presented at TED2012, March 2, 2012, Long Beach Performing Arts Center. © Al Vernacchio, 2012, 2022. All Rights Reserved