

## I'm in a long-term relationship and we've lost the spark

### ▶ DEAR JOE

I've been with my husband for almost a decade now and he's my world. We had a civil partnership two years ago and while I can't imagine my life without him, things have been really stale for a while now. Our lives have pretty much become an endless cycle of going to work, coming home and spending the evening in front of the laptop or TV. We're both so tired that we have sex maybe a couple of times a month, and I snore so most of the week we'll sleep in separate bedrooms anyway. Without putting too fine a point on it, when we do get down to it, it's pretty much just a 'shuffle and sleep'. I feel like we're more friends than lovers and I miss the excitement we had in the early days. We've had the odd threesome in the past but we're not the type that could ever open up our relationship. Is this just what life is destined to be now?

MELVIN, RICHMOND

### ▶ HI MELVIN

First of all, congratulations for being together ten years and still feeling your husband is your world! That is an accomplishment and tells me that you have worked through some issues that certainly would have come up in all those years. That said, relationships do become very stale if you don't know how to keep things fresh.

There are therapists who believe that if you make the relationship better, the sex will come. There are other therapists who believe that if you work on creating a better sex life, the relationship will come around. Both of these theories are false. The truth is that couples need to work on both. When I work with couples we have two narratives that we address about their relationship: 1) The love and emotional part of their relationship and 2) the sexual part of their relationship.

In your case, both the emotional and sexual sides of your relationship absolutely need to be addressed. It is easy to get into routines in partnerships. You need to communicate about a few things to move forward.

All couples – straight or gay – inevitably lose the sexual spark in their relationship. It is a natural evolution of relationships based on familiarity. Couples are always trying to reconcile the domestic and the erotic. Worldwide sex expert Esther Perel talks about reconciling and love and eroticism and how to navigate to keep sex alive in monogamous marriages. She talks about how the love part of the relationship asks for knowing everything about each other. But 'knowing all' breeds too much familiarity and kills erotica between partners. Eroticism, she says, demands mystery.

You both sound too familiar, with a lack of mystery and spontaneity.

My first question is this: When sex was good, what was good about it? Usually couples report that sex is best in the beginning of the relationship. I would coach you both to talk about things you used to enjoy and start to bring those things back into your relationship.

Just because you don't sleep together doesn't mean you can't bring sexy back into your relationship. A lot of people don't share bedrooms as couples. Many wealthy couples have his and her (or his and his) bedrooms with a shared bathroom and closet so not to disturb each other because of work or travel. But this doesn't have to mean the end of a sex life!

Many couples think they have to wait for the sex to naturally return. This will only result in their waiting forever. Couples have to intentionally create situations to be sexual. I hear partners say, "I should not have to make an appointment with my husband to have sex, we're married." My response is that you absolutely have to make an appointment to have sex with your partner. People plan rendezvous with each other all the time. When you are dating you are always ready for sex, so you can be



spontaneous; you don't *need* to plan sex because you are always prepared. When people have affairs, they are also making plans to have sex and scheduling it into their appointment books. Neither of these experiences take the excitement out of being sexual for any of the partners – and it shouldn't deplete the excitement from long-time married couples either!

You must accept that you will never have the exact same excitement you had in the beginning – that is nature's way of helping partners bond with each other and commit. It falls away from all couples and they are left with going about it on their own afterward. You can revive and bring back elements of the passion from the beginning but you will have to work at it.

#### HERE ARE SOME TIPS:

##### 1. MAKE A DATE WITH EACH OTHER.

Create a day and time to meet and be sexy with each other. Maybe you go out to a club or even just dinner, but whatever it is, go out and be boys and flirt with each other like you did in the beginning.

##### 2. TELL EACH OTHER HOW YOU WANT TO BE PLEASED.

The platinum rule is do unto your partner what they want to be done unto them. Ask your partner how they want to be sexually pleased. What turns them on? Tell them what turns you on. Negotiate how you will make efforts to engage in pleasing behaviors with one another.

##### 3. PUT SOME VARIETY IN YOUR SEX LIFE.

I worked with a gay couple once where one of them enjoyed sex through a glory hole, so they bought some dry wall and put it up in their basement and drilled a hole to have oral and anal sex through. They told me it was some of the hottest sex they had with one another in a long time.

##### 4. TRY EDGING AND POSTPONE INTERCOURSE AND ORGASM.

Edging is when you allow yourself to be aroused but don't allow yourself to cum. I encourage couples to have lots of foreplay, watch some porn, share fantasies and get each other to the edge but the rules are no penetration and no orgasm – at least in the beginning of trying to revive a sex life in their relationship. Later, they can move to intercourse and orgasm and when they do they will have a great sexual experience!



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