



Make Sex a Priority

I know there are people out there who say to themselves, “That Dr. Ruth, all she does is think about sex.” Admittedly, I devote more of my mental energies than most people to the subject of sex, especially since I still maintain a private practice, which means I’m continually analyzing the sex lives of my clients. But I’m realistic and I don’t expect everyone else to spend as much time as I do thinking and talking about this delightful subject, though sometimes I feel sorry for everyone else who has to think about data bases, sales charts, and everything else but sex!

You might think that with all the attention the media pays to sex these days, everyone’s sex life would be full to the brim, but the truth is that too many of us allow our sex lives to be drowned under the flood of all the other activities fighting for our attention, from work and family matters to watching television, playing video games, answering e-mails, chatting online, or even doing something as old-fashioned as reading a book. And this, my friends, is a big mistake. Sex deserves a special place in all your lives, so whatever deluge of events is flooding your calendars, it’s your duty to make sure your sex life has a safe harbor.

Many experts in human resources speak about a work/life balance, worrying that workers who spend too much time on the job end up damaging their family life, which then affects their work performance. My goal with this book is to convince you that,

similarly, if your sex/life balance is way out of whack, you'll harm your entire relationship.

So why is it so important to give sex a special place in your lives? Obviously, sex is a source of pleasure and a way to relieve sexual tension, which, if allowed to build up, can lead to all sorts of psychological problems. But for anyone in a relationship, sex is also a key component of the glue that holds that relationship together. A relationship in which sex has been pushed off into a lonely corner is not a healthy one. It's an indication that something is amiss, that the couple's bonds are becoming more and more fragile, liable to permanent damage.

And by the way, this applies to couples of any age. Yes, younger couples may have sex more often, but sex deserves a place in every relationship, even if both partners are in their eighties or nineties, providing that health concerns don't prevent sex from being possible.

As an individual, you can't live without air, water, and food, but even I have to admit that you can survive without sex. (Not that I'm suggesting you should attempt a bout of celibacy, but you can.) But a romantic/sexual relationship, not a platonic friendship, does require sex to survive. We are all sexual beings. Whether we want them to or not, sexual urges arise in our brains on quite a regular schedule. You can try to shunt them aside, but eventually they'll bubble up into your consciousness. And even if you are distracted by a million things going on in your life, when these sexual yearnings arise in you, sooner or later they'll grab your attention. However, if your partner isn't in the mood, then what happens? In many cases, nothing, and if your sexual yearnings are completely out of synch, a sexual drought can go on for weeks, months, and even years. And the longer it goes on, the more damage to your overall relationship. So if you want to keep your relationship healthy, you, as a couple, must learn how to get your sex lives in synch.

Sexual tension need not be a negative force; if used properly, it can actually have quite positive effects on your relationship.

If you're having sex regularly, then the urge to satisfy this sexual tension is having a positive effect, as you're both fulfilling a need in the other, one that no one else in the world can do for either one of you (provided you're in a monogamous relationship, that is). However, if you're rarely having sex, or worse, never having sex, then the two of you have a predicament. For while good sex helps to bind a relationship, too much unrelieved sexual tension can do real damage, especially if one of the partners begins to look outside of the relationship for sexual satisfaction. (And that holds true whether this person is actually having sex outside the relationship or just contemplating the possibility.)

How Often to Have Sex

I'm often asked how often should a couple of this or that age be having sex. Statistics can't provide an answer to that question because it's really very individualistic. The two partners probably have different needs, but that's okay as long as they can work out how much sex is required to keep the relationship running smoothly. But I can tell you that if there's almost no sex taking place, then the relationship is out of balance, which will show up not only in the couple's sex life but in other aspects of their relationship as well. A couple dragging themselves through the sexual desert will find their relationship slowly drying up over time so that eventually it will shrivel up into a worthless state. So while I'm not suggesting that you have to imitate the proverbial pair of bunny rabbits, you do have to make certain that sexual activity remains a constant in your lives.

Spontaneous Sex

There's an idea, or should I say ideal, some people have lodged in their brain that says sex is always supposed to be spontaneous.

That can be a very dangerous attitude to adopt, and the following case illustrates this point:

CASE HISTORY *Jeff and Judy*

Jeff and Judy were in their midthirties. They both held full-time jobs and had two young children. To say their lives were full is an understatement. Jeff had to be on the phone with European clients early in the morning, so he would go to bed around nine o'clock most evenings because he had to be up at four the next morning. Since Judy had barely put the children to bed at that time, she needed to stay up to give herself some time to unwind, by either reading or watching TV. On weekends, the children loved to jump into their parents' bed first thing in the morning, which meant that Jeff, who got shortchanged on sleep during the week, often couldn't keep his eyes open on weekend nights much past ten. Because of this time schedule, slowly but surely their sex life had been dwindling, so that sexless week after sexless week would go by, sometimes adding up to an entire month. They both were upset about it, but when Jeff suggested to Judy that they set aside some time for sex, she rebuffed the idea. She felt that sex wasn't something that could be scheduled but had to occur in the heat of the moment, and she was of the opinion that if she no longer generated enough heat in Jeff, then something was wrong with their relationship. Clearly, that attitude didn't help their sex lives any, and that's when they came to see me.

Let me be very clear, I am all for spontaneous sex. But far more important than having spontaneous sex is having sex altogether.



*If two people can't get in synch spontaneously,
then they must schedule time and
circumstances for sex.*

It should be fairly obvious what a couple like Jeff and Judy should do with regard to scheduling time. Once a week they should both look at their calendars and pick a night when Jeff can either go in to the office a little later in the morning, or perhaps he won't mind having a little less sleep; and Judy should go to bed with Jeff at nine and they should make love. If she wants to get up afterward, she's free to do so.

There's nothing complicated about this method of ensuring that they have sex, but with couples in situations similar to Jeff and Judy's, if they don't plan to have sex, I guarantee it won't happen spontaneously. That's not to say their plans will always work out. If one of their children develops a stomachache that night, then their plans will go awry. But most of the time it should work. And then despite their different schedules, they can still maintain at least a minimal sex life.

There are, of course, other factors besides when you go to bed that can throw a monkey wrench into your love life. For example, with regard to this couple, allowing their children open access to their bedroom can be catastrophic. If they're going to remain a couple with an active sex life, they have to put an end to this habit of allowing the kids to get into their beds on weekend mornings. Friday or Saturday night would be a perfect time to have sex, but only if Jeff knows that he can sleep late the next day. To allow their children to decide when the parents are to get up on weekends is just not acceptable.

Another potential factor can be the location of where you have sex. If you're a couple like Jeff and Judy with young kids, just knowing they're sleeping, or supposed to be sleeping, in the next room can inhibit you, and stifle your sex life. Don't let that happen. Make sure that occasionally you can make love without having to worry about the children. For example, you could hire a babysitter on a Saturday night, leave the house at 6 PM, have dinner and then rent a motel room for a few hours. (Or go to the motel room first and then go to dinner, or bring a picnic dinner to the motel room, or any combination of the above!) Or you can ship your children to grandparents or other relatives overnight, or make a deal with friends who have kids and have sleepaways twice a month, with each set of parents getting a free night a month that way.



*If finding the time and privacy to have sex
is a problem at home, you need to make some
changes so that your love life has a place in
which to be nurtured.*

In the case of Jeff and Judy, the children were contributing to the scheduling problems, but there are plenty of couples who don't have children living at home who also can't seem to find time for sex. For some couples it's a matter of the two of them working different shifts. Sometimes the reason is that a night owl is married to an early riser. For others a hobby or sport might get in the way, such as when a husband leaves for the golf course or the fishing boat on weekend mornings. In the end, it doesn't matter what the reason is for a sex life to have gone into hibernation; if scheduling sex is the way to get it going again, then that's what the couple has to do. And if part of the equation for setting the schedule requires

some other changes, like a few hours at a motel, then such factors must be taken into account when figuring out the solution that works best for the two of you.

Vacations can be a good time to invigorate your sex life, but if you have children and share a hotel room, then that won't happen. My advice is to rent a house or condo with your own bedroom in whatever place you're visiting. It might seem more expensive, but the money you'll save on meals you can have at home instead of going to a restaurant will more than make up the difference.

Sex on a Timetable

When Jeff and Judy came to see me, Judy's immediate reaction to my suggestion about scheduling sex was, "I can't make myself become aroused. Sure I can lie there and let Jeff have his way with me, but I won't get anything out of it." Now with that attitude, you don't need to have studied psychosexual therapy to know that her prediction will come true and she won't enjoy it. But the fact is, Judy was wrong on two counts.

There's a French saying, *L'appetit vient en mangeant*, which roughly translates into "Your appetite will arrive on the next Metro once you've taken the first couple of bites of your boeuf bourguignon." It's a sensation I'm sure everyone has experienced: not thinking you were hungry when you sat down to eat but finishing every morsel once your taste buds were awakened by the first few forkfuls. (And if it didn't work, blame the chef.) The same principle can work with regard to sex.

If you climb into bed and allow your partner to work some magic on you with his or her fingers or tongue, I bet that you will become aroused. Of course you can force yourself not to be interested. If you concentrate on something unsexy, like the need to do your taxes, then whatever your partner does to you will be wasted.

But if you let your mind put aside everyday worries and focus on the sensations, assuming your relationship is a good one, then in all probability you'll become aroused.

If you have serious relationship problems, then no amount of physical ministrations is going to get you aroused, but in that case it's not just a lack of time that's keeping you apart physically, but a lack of desire to be intimate as well. If that's the case, then you may need professional counseling.

No One Should Be Left in the Lurch

I'm urging you to give scheduled sex your best shot, but I have to admit that there are going to be times when you just can't put aside the events of the day. The two of you are scheduled to have sex, but your boss made a snide remark as you were walking out the door that has you seething. If you're a woman, it may just not be possible to overcome those emotions and become sexually aroused. So you climb into bed naked with your husband, he does all he can to arouse you, and nothing happens. Do you merely say "Sorry dear" and turn over?



Whether you are a man or a woman, if your partner has become sexually aroused by this attempt to get you ready for sex, you have a duty to give your partner an orgasm.

Now this is easier for women to do, and it's also more likely that a man can overcome outside influences to become aroused, but whatever your sex, you still retain that duty. A man who can't

get an erection can still give his female partner an orgasm using his fingers, his tongue, or his big toe. The problem here is circumstantial, not one of bad faith, and if you love your partner, you don't want to leave him or her frustrated.

A True Aphrodisiac

I don't believe in aphrodisiacs per se; for example, some people believe that eating chocolate or oysters can make you sexually aroused, while I say that eating anything can make you sexually aroused, providing you believe that it will. Scheduling, on the other hand, absolutely does have aphrodisiacal powers, more so for women, but it works for both sexes.

If in the morning the two of you agree that you'll be having sex that evening, and you allow yourself to think about the pleasurable moments that await you during the course of the day, actually stopping what you're doing and fantasizing about the night's activities, that will cause you to become aroused. Since women take longer to become fully aroused than men, such pauses for a little sexual daydreaming can be very effective later on. Even when you put aside those thoughts and go back to what you were doing (and please don't engage in one of these fantasies while you're driving), the arousal process will be continuing in your brain, subconsciously. Then, when you're finally in each other's arms, the arousal process, already warmed up during the course of the day, will start up a lot more quickly. So in this regard, scheduled sex has a major edge over spontaneous sex.

If you want to increase the arousing effect this anticipation can have, then use some physical reminders. For example, if a woman puts on some very sexy underwear in the morning, and makes sure that her husband sees it, it will leave an image in his head that will keep his engine purring all day; and every time she remembers what she's wearing, she too will feel a little tingly "down there."

Added Effects

By the way, when you're taking an active part in making sure that your sex life is healthy, I'm going to bet that the rest of your life takes on a rosier glow as well. If all you're doing is working, if your day is filled with nothing but chores, then that is going to wear you down psychologically. But if you know that the week is going to have some moments of intense pleasure, whether they're scheduled or not, then that will give you a lift. It's similar to the way that knowing there's a weekend coming up makes it easier to work through the other five days, or looking forward to a vacation makes the prior months more bearable.

You're Not Just Friends

Rest assured that an active sex life is also going to do wonders for your relationship. Sex certainly provides individual pleasure, but it also makes the two of you more intimate. Intimacy is very important in a romantic relationship. It's what distinguishes it from a friendship. However close your relationship with your best friend, the two of you are not intimate. You may share very intimate information with a best friend, but you don't kiss, stroke, fondle, caress, or give each other orgasms. Those intimate activities are reserved for one person in your life, your lover. Remove that intimacy and you become nothing more than good friends. But then that friendship becomes just one of many. It's no longer special. So to make sure that your relationship remains above all others, you have to maintain a healthy sex life together.



*To maintain and increase your level of intimacy
with your partner, make sure that you keep your
sex life in good shape.*

Don't Take Each Other for Granted

There are other ways of making sex a priority that don't involve a calendar. For example, if when you're home together you're always wearing your grungiest clothing, that's not sexy. I understand that after a hard day you want to get comfortable, but it's possible to dress comfortably and still remain a little sexy. I'm also not telling you that the only place you should shop is Victoria's Secret. But there's also nothing wrong with dressing up a bit in front of each other. Slobs aren't sexy, and if you always look like one in front of your lover, you're sending a message that you don't really care about sex. This also applies to what you wear to bed. If you cover yourself from head to toe in flannel, that may send the wrong message. In the dead of winter, it may be okay to cover your body in layers, but as soon as the temperatures start to warm up, leave some of those layers in your drawers.



*Pay attention to how you appear in front
of your partner.*

By the way, just because one of you is dressed a bit more sexily, it doesn't mean that you're going to have sex that day or evening. The same is true if you hold each other, kiss passionately, or give each other back rubs. All these could lead to sex, but they don't have to. But such activities will increase the presence that sex has in your life together, and in the long run, they will also mean that you have more sex.

When I say not to take each other for granted, that also means in ways that may not appear to have anything to do with sex but are most certainly connected. For example, a father who changes diapers is actually being sexy. I don't mean to say that

the act of changing a diaper is sexy, but showing enough concern for your partner that you don't leave her doing 100 percent of the child-care duties is showing that you care, and that is sexy. So included in the list of sexy activities are putting out the trash, doing the laundry, cleaning the dining room table, and filling the dishwasher. Anything that shows you care about your partner, even little gestures, is part of the overall program of making sex a priority.



*Make a point of showing you care about
your partner as often and in as many
ways as possible.*

The Role of Romance

Men don't necessarily require romance in order to engage in sex, but that's not true for women, at least for a good part of the time. Yes, there are women for whom a quickie is great, but even those women require some romance at other times.

Romance helps to free a woman, allowing her to make sex a priority. A romantic evening swaddles her in love so that she can put aside her worries and concentrate on becoming sexually aroused. Because men are not as affected by romance as women, many don't give it the importance it deserves. In other words, they dismiss it, or pretend to act romantically in a perfunctory manner that destroys the romance rather than enhances it. I discuss a lot more about romance in Chapter 6.



If sex is going to be a priority in a couple's life, then the man must accept the requirements of romance.

Be Realistic

This is an issue I'll be touching on in several chapters, but that's because it's important. Many people expect their love life to resemble what they see on television or in the movies. The problem with such expectations is that what you see on-screen, even on so-called reality shows, is only a distorted reflection of real life. Comparing yourself to characters you see is going to distort your view of your own love life. Just as you don't expect zombies to pop up every time you pass a graveyard or aliens to abduct you when you go to bed at night, don't believe that your love life is going to follow the script of the many pairs of lovers you've seen on stage and screen.



Keep your expectations for your love life grounded in reality.

Remember to make sure that your love life doesn't get overwhelmed by every other activity that's grabbing at every precious minute of your day and night. You must make it a high-priority item. Lovemaking doesn't have to take a lot of time, but it needs

to happen with some regularity in order to keep your relationship healthy. So don't leave your love life to fall victim to the vagaries of chance, or you'll be gambling with your entire relationship. Instead, be proactive so that no matter how insane the rest of your life, having sex is part of the mix.