

# Putting Loving Sex Back Into Your Relationship!

by John Henderson, M.Div., M.Th., RMFT ©2010 John Henderson

Every week another potentially loving couple arrives at my office, distraught over their dissatisfied sex life. Couples complain their relationship and sex life isn't what it used to be when they were first married. Between having children, juggling two careers, family and personal commitments, stress filled commutes and providing a taxi service to kids hockey, soccer games and music lessons – it's no wonder many couples find the spark has gone out of their love life.

## Henderson's Four Warning Signs:

1. The first thing to disappear in a relationship seems to be loving communication. Complaints, frustration and criticism of one's partner increases as dissatisfaction grows. Communication becomes tense, critical, judgmental and tragically filled with sarcasm. Sadly, couples in this situation stop sending each other the loving affirmations, appreciations, and caring compliments that keep the relationship wheels turning.
2. Next to decline is affection. It's hard to feel attractive and interested in someone if they are dumping on you. When unresolved anger increases, affection decreases. With fewer hugs and less hand holding also comes the loss of good feelings toward one's partner and even oneself!
3. One or both partners can become depressed at this point. Negative self-talk and blaming your partner (or self) closes the door on developing intimacy. Misperceptions, frustration and anger often erupt. In the worst cases, this can lead to explosive anger and even inappropriate aggression, hostility or violence.
4. Stalemate – In this stage, conflicted couples have often made numerous unsuccessful attempts to rekindle their intimacy, only to

meet with rejection or failure. To protect themselves from even greater emotional hurt, couples “stale-mate” each other – and wall themselves off from their partner. Each person is no longer able to initiate simple compliments or affection because the darts of rejection and rebuff have become too entrenched. Like a stale-mate in a chess game, no one makes a move, and this makes for very “stale” – mates!

Other factors in the breakdown of a couple’s sex life include: alcoholism, drugs, affairs, Internet addictions, work-aholism, financial worries, stress and family problems and problems re-engaging sexual relations after the birth of a child. Complex issues such as touch aversion, loss of desire, male & female sexual problems (erectile difficulties, painful intercourse etc), may require a referral to a Registered Sex Therapist.

While the following tips may seem simple, many couples find that to get them to work, they are best to see a Registered Marriage & Family Therapist or counsellor for detailed guidance.

**Step 1:** Increase and Improve Your Loving Communication: – Using your tongue to send loving words of appreciation to your partner is still the best ‘oral’ technique. A trained couple therapist can really help you restore positive communication to your relationship. Saying and doing loving things for each other is the basic first step to restoring intimacy. It can be something simple as bringing your partner a cup of tea/cold drink or writing them a ‘missing you’ or ‘thinking about you’ note and leaving in their appointment diary. Don’t take your partner for granted. Thank them and be specific saying: “Thanks – I really appreciated your help getting the kids dressed today.” The task is to consciously develop a list of 5 or more compliments and appreciations for your partner and both communicate them in a genuine and loving way. Couples often need professional assistance jumping over the hurdle of starting this task. A trained Registered Marriage & Family Therapist or counsellor is an inexpensive investment in your relationship future.

**Step 2:** Add Holding Hands & Hugs Slowly: Loving Touch is a basic human need. We need gentle loving touch and hugs that don’t always lead to the bedroom, in order to feel safe and good again with our partner before a sex life can be rekindled. It’s all about soothing. Ask your counsellor or Registered Marriage & Family Therapist for exercises to restore affectionate

touch to your relationship.

**Step 3:** Can Antidepressants be added to the drinking water? Well not really, but talk to your family doctor about whether one of the newer antidepressants (SSRI – serotonin reuptake inhibitors) is appropriate for you in your situation. Getting regular exercise is one of the best ways to help you cope with changes in mood. Eating healthy, going for a walk 3 times a week, and getting a good night's sleep can help in regaining your emotional balance. Don't be afraid to talk to your therapist and family doctor about your moods and feelings. Unresolved anger often makes rekindling touch difficult. Be honest with yourself – it might just save your marriage.

**Step 4:** Consider seeing a Counsellor – If you're sleeping in separate beds, watching TV late at night to avoid going upstairs, or spending 5 minutes in a refrigerator feels warmer than spending 5 minutes in a room with your partner, you probably would benefit from seeing a OAMFT Clinical Fellow/Therapist or counsellor. I tell my clients that counselling is just like getting the oil changed regularly in your car – every relationship needs an emotional oil change.

**Step 5:** Go Out on a Date: Remember what it felt like to anticipate going out on a date? Be creative and invite your partner out on a date. Think of someplace they would like to go. Write them a note, call or text them on the phone and ask them if they would like to go out on a date and are available. (Prearrange babysitting). Keep it fun and easy going. Don't expect sex on the first date! Simply appreciate the opportunity to talk, listen, hold hands and enjoy being with each other. As you become more comfortable with your partner, pay attention to your body's signals of desire and arousal. Remember that if you can't talk about sex in your relationship, it probably is a sign you are not ready to do it – and that applies to a lot more topics than just sex. Some couples have unrealistic expectations about how often sex should occur and think everyone is having more of it that they are. It doesn't matter if its twice a week or twice a month, what matters more is that both partners are comfortable and content with the communication, quality, timing, frequency, emotion, connection, trust, emotional sensitivity and affection they are able so share with one another. Enjoy and be content with what works for the two of you and build on your successes from there. Don't try for the sexual Olympics right away.

Remember sex is as much about enjoying being with each other as it is about

having sex. It's about making love more than making sex. Remember the most powerful sex organ is the brain, and the largest is the human skin. Get reconnected there first, and a healthy sex life will follow.

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