

Let's talk about sex

Do you need to step up?



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With Joanne Wilson

If I asked you, "What is one of the most thrilling, magical and unforgettable experiences in your life?" Would it be that last tub of cookie dough ice cream or meeting your true love, commitment and becoming sexually intimate? Was/is this experience the basis of your emotional well-being, sense of security and your own personal mirror of self-development?

Intimacy changes and empowers us. Starry-eyed, we each leverage the other's point of view and skills as we navigate life together. Access to shared resources can increase our belief in our ability to reach our goals, personally and as a team. As 'you and me' becomes 'we', the initial rush of intimacy building is a heady and exciting experience. However, for many couples, this becomes anything but.

As a marriage therapist, I have the sacred honour of listening to the moving accounts from both men and women on their experiences of baring all, and their souls. From where I sit, it does mean so much in ways you wouldn't think, along with the myriad of good and bad consequences.

In the therapy room, we sometimes marvel about the sexual differences between the gas-oven-type blokes versus the electric-slow-burn female version. We muse over the way blokes will "tap her on the shoulder" after a day of tense, silent conflict, while the woman retreats with shock, preferring a more communicative approach to reconnect first.

Then there is the heartache of the guys who struggle with not fulfilling the sex-crazed stereotype, while their wife grapples with feeling sexually unattractive and ugly. Sex – it means so much.

The early days of your relationship are high in helpful oxytocin – the feel-good hormone. We take more risks, are out to impress and less likely to consider consequences. Oxytocin helps us pair



Sex is an important way to create that magic bond. PHOTO: PEXELS

up!

As time goes on, and for all sorts of reasons, we don't always put in as much effort and may take the other person for granted. Your spouse is then less likely to feel amorous, resulting in fewer opportunities for the sense of value and connection derived from playing hanky-panky.

Sex sure creates an amazing, almost mysterious bond. It's an incredible union of souls that brings couples together.

Many men derive a real sense of feeling valued from sex, rather than just "getting their rocks off"! So, for men, not having sex can be a big problem and some can barely function without it. Maybe the ladies need to step up and make an effort just because it is important. Whoa – controversial, I know. Equally, perhaps men need to work at being alluring too. If you smell, don't look after yourself and are steadily working on your beer

gut, then your wife probably isn't going to be dancing in the sheets with you in a hurry. It's important to ask guys what they are doing to make sex an attractive prospect for their wives. It may well even start with emptying the dishwasher.

Many couples compare their frequency of intercourse with others, but it's mutual satisfaction and not frequency that matters. If a couple is enjoying sex just on their birthdays then I'm happy if they're happy! The challenge arises when one partner wants it every other day and the other is only interested in having sex once a month.

It is never too late to begin to have the courage to address any such canoodling conundrums and speak to a professional therapist. In the meantime, here are some ideas:

► Are we able to comfortably talk about this topic together? For some, stepping up might just mean mustering up the courage to talk to each other about intimacy issues.

► Did I go into this relationship with unrealistic preconceptions of having the same libido as my spouse all the time?

► Do we regularly set aside a sacred space in our lives for sex and give it the attention it deserves?

► Do we try to save some of the best of ourselves for each other? How are your energy and fitness levels – getting sufficient sleep, exercise and eating a healthy diet?

► Do I pay attention to my appearance to help ensure I feel confident, handsome or sexy?

► In what ways can I healthily learn to find joy in sex, which may have been damaged by previous experiences, for my long-term mental health and the longevity of my marriage?

► What are the consequences of my decisions on my family and community, even for many generations to come, if I'm thinking of seeking sex elsewhere? More on that hot topic soon.

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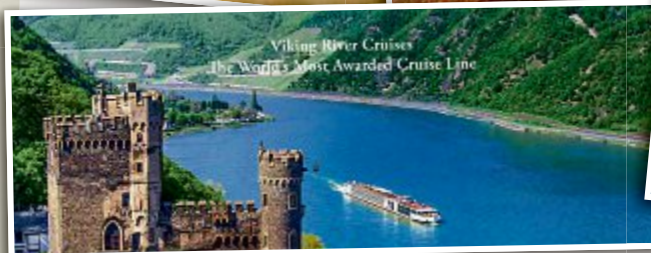
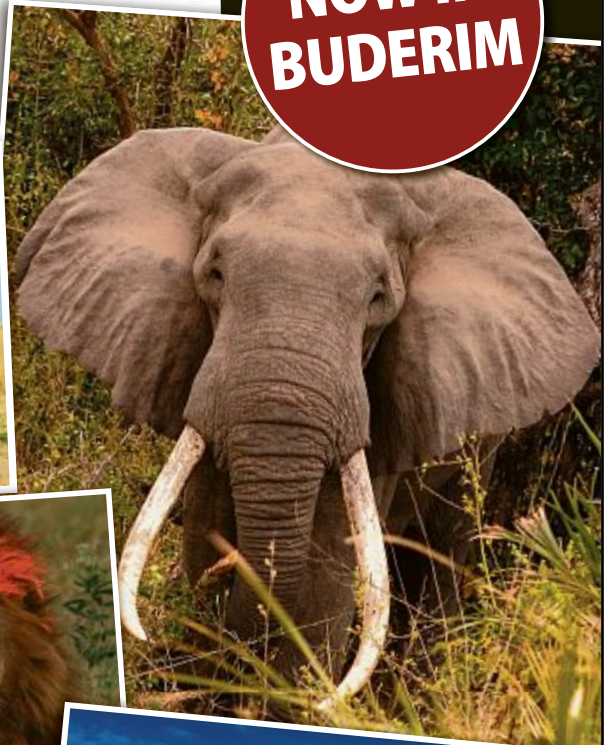
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