

CAN THIS BE LOVE?

HOW TO PUT A LITTLE SEXUAL OOMPH BACK IN YOUR LIFE

Most couples go through periods when sex makes as rare an appearance in their bedroom as forgotten \$100 bills do in their wallet. These are The Sexual Doldrums, and they seem to be as inevitable in a long-term relationship as the gradual realization that your partner has a distressing number of traits in common with your father. Being with the same man long enough to have fought with him over two presidential elections has made me an expert in this one area of sex at least. (The *only* area, according to my lover, who points out, with some justification, that being an expert in sexual deprivation isn't something he'd be so quick to boast about if he were me.) But my feeling is, if you know something, pass it on. So

here's how to tell if you and your partner are going through a period of sexual slowdown, and if so, what you can do to get out of it.

1. Is the number of times you've made love in the last six months more or less than the number of times you've had a hair cut?

2. Is the number of times you've *enjoyed* making love in the last six months roughly equivalent to the number of times you've won your state's million dollar lottery?

3. Who would you say has a more active sex life, you or your mother?

4. Would you liken your sexual encounters to a) a meal in a four-star restaurant; b) a long bus trip or c) periodontal surgery?

5. After you and your partner make love, do you feel a) beautiful; b) tired or c) nauseated?

6. Would you describe your partner as a) ardent; b) passive or c) dead from the waist down?

7. When other people talk about sex, does your partner a) smack his lips; b) say something like "Sex? What's that?" or c) change the subject?

If the honest answers to these questions leave you feeling that, compared to you and your partner, the amoeba has an exciting sex life, then the next step is to pinpoint the

root of your difficulties. It's been my experience that, where generally loving partners are concerned, sexual problems can often be traced to 1) poor timing, 2) infelicitous approach or 3) inappropriate motivation.

An example of poor timing is the woman who runs her fingers suggestively through her lover's hair shortly after telling him how thin it's getting on top. Ask yourself if you've ever chosen to make sexual overtures to your partner on the same evening you've informed him that both of his new suits make him look "portly." Ask yourself if you routinely make amorous advances to him when he is otherwise engaged, thereby putting yourself in the position of vying for his attention with Herschel Walker. Was the last time you suggested the two of you jump into bed together the night he came in next to last in the Boston Marathon?

And what about him? Does he choose to tickle your neck at the very moment you are on the telephone trying to explain to your mother why you will be having Christmas dinner this year not at her house as usual, but in the Yucatan? Does he have the gall to make advances to you after he's spent an entire dinner hour practically composing a rhapsody about the new female accountant in his office? These blunders all suggest that you could try to be more sensitive to one another's feelings—no matter how infantile.

Next you might try examining the kinds of sexual approaches used by you and your partner. No matter how amorous your intentions, grasping the waist of a man who's diligently dieting and referring playfully to his "love handles" will in all probability *not* light a fire in his heart. Just think how you feel when your partner's attempt at verbal foreplay comes out in a phrase like "there seems to be a little more of you here than there used to be." Following this reasoning, it's probably not a good idea to use pet names for sexual purposes, especially if those names are "lunkhead" and "pea brain."

Finally, check out both your own and your partner's motivations for making sexual advances. For instance, was the last time you made an amorous move in his direction the evening you accidentally blurted out to a roomful of friends that he was the first in your crowd to get a removable bridge? And when he took you in his arms the other night, did you see, over his shoulder, a telegram from his mother announcing that she and her best friend's daughter, Miss Florida, were arriving shortly for a two-week stay? If so, then the two of you should make a pact that sex be used only to express love, not bug-eyed fear!

Remember, finally, that most couples go through periods of sexual slack, and there's no need to worry unduly about yours—unless, of course, it outlasts your lease.

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