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The Wrong Way and the Right Way to Make Love

A Newlywed's Survival Guide

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Does a couple's sex life diminish, if not completely disappear, once married? Not true for TJ and me after two years of marriage. Let me tell you more.

Pre-marriage, TJ and I had an excellent sex life. From what our friends say, we had more frequent and exciting sex. Our spontaneous, creative, and eager sex continued throughout our engagement. But the stress from the upcoming wedding, buying a house and becoming pregnant reduced the frequency of sex, but apparently not below the frequency typical of most couples.

Post-nuptials our frequency and quantity of sex immediately increased, but then drastically decreased. Again, we blamed stress. I had the desire, but I was too tired to make love and this frustrated TJ.

TJ tried three tactics to increase the quantity and quality of our sex. Let's call them Guilt, Tarzan-like behavior, and romantic behavior.

TJ most commonly used the Guilt Tactic. He would say, "You used to do that all the time," "Boy would that be nice," "You used to be so adventurous," or "Like that would ever happen anymore." Next he would pout, much like a child who had not gotten his way. I wanted to escape from these aversive behaviors. Unfortunately, I would give in. This was good because I enjoyed sex, but bad because I was reinforcing TJ's sarcasm and pouting. Of course, TJ was negatively reinforcing my joining him for sex because he terminated his sarcasm and pouting once I began having sex with him. Although the

outcome was more sex, I was angry about TJ manipulating me and affecting other aspects of our relationship.

TJ's manipulative behavior was reinforced, but later I would complain about it. Eventually he tried a new approach: The Tarzan Tactic. Now he imitated the fictional jungle hero almost to the point of saying, "Me man. You woman. You mine."

Although this kind of sex may periodically be exciting and enjoyable, everyday it is not. TJ would grab, pinch or goose me. His behavior did not go any further, and stopped when asked. But often I gave in and reinforced it. This increased TJ acting like Tarzan. The Tarzan behavior annoyed me and I came to resent TJ because it diminished our relationship.

Although The Guilt Tactic and Tarzan Tactic produced more sex, our marriage suffered. Fortunately, TJ tried one more approach that produced only positive consequences: The Romance Tactic. Romance included sweet kisses and massages but not always sex. Sometimes thoughtful nonsexual actions did increase my sexual gratitude. For example, yesterday TJ atypically made our son's lunch. I immediately kissed him, which led to a wonderful afternoon delight. Telling me I looked beautiful when dressed up was sweet and appreciated, but did not turn me into a lust machine. However, saying something without the hint of a hidden agenda was reinforced often in sexual ways. Having sex after TJ romanced me reinforced his behavior. Also, because I consistently reinforced his romantic behavior, it occurred with increasing frequency. Romance improved the quality of every aspect of our relationship. Today we are satisfied with the quality and quantity of sex.

To newlywed men, please realize Romance is the best way to improve all aspects of your marriage, including your sex life. To newlywed women, avoid unintentionally reinforcing your husbands' negative behaviors. When you give in to the Guilt Tactic or the Tarzan Tactic, even occasionally, you are reinforcing undesirable behavior. When positive romantic behaviors occur, consistently reinforce them so they will increase. Marriage takes work, but Romance can improve all aspects of marriage, including sex.