

When the spark wanes

By Sarah Milne

I often meet people who are in long-term relationships and they say they are 'over' sex.

'Gosh, by the time I get to bed I am so tired,' bemoaned one woman. 'Sex is the last thing on my mind. I just hope my husband will keep his hands to himself and leave me in peace.'

'Oh', said another woman, 'Sex is only for procreation and I've had my children. Now I don't need sex any-more.'

'I'm so sick of sex,' grumbled a well-dressed man, looking slightly embarrassed.

'I used to feel that I had to work for it all the time. And my partner never seemed that interested. Now I just don't want to go there at all. I haven't tried to have sex in months.'

And so people turn their backs on sex in their relationship. Usually it happens slowly and insidiously. Maybe they stop taking the time to kiss each other goodbye in the mornings before they part for work. Maybe the romantic texts throughout the day start to diminish. Maybe they just slowly stop appreciating each other.

Often it happens so gradually that it is possible to miss the erosion. Instead of there being conversations about passion, there's talk about whose turn it is to put the garbage out.

The sex in their sex-cessful relationship just quietly disappeared.

If a couple takes the time to think back to the early days of their romance they might be able to recall the heady, romantic memories of how their love for one another used to feel. Maybe they can remember a fleeting touch from their partner, or a stolen gaze, and how it used to send shivers of excitement down their spine. It felt like they were really alive, and their whole world was glowing.

This early love can lift people out of the mundane and into an exciting world filled with emotion, and passion, and uncertainty.

Back in those days, it was easy to make time for each other.

The other person was a priority, and priorities are allocated time and attention. Inevitably, their partner and the relationship were hugely important.

But, over time, the passion and excitement wanes. Often it is replaced by a sense of stability, of predictability and of sameness. And with this stability can come a demise of the passion and the sexuality.

It can be particularly hard if one partner wants more sex and the other partner is content with less. This can lead to arguments and resentments, and feeling that the partner who wants less wields a disproportionate amount of control over the relationship.

As dissatisfaction becomes the norm, one or both partners may be tempted to look elsewhere for their sexual satisfaction.

If this sounds like a familiar scenario to you, it is important to remember that no one partner is completely at fault. This is a shared concern, a relationship issue, as opposed to an individual problem.

The very first requirement is a mutual commitment to work through the issues. It is going to take time and it requires a significant commitment to the future of the

relationship. Both partners have to be committed to finding solutions and implementing them.

Professional guidance may be required as this can be a challenging process to work through. It can also, ultimately, strengthen and improve the overall quality of the relationship.

It is also important to ‘think the best’ of your partner.

What do I mean here?

Sometimes we focus on the worst things in our relationships and we only see the faults in our partners – the things we do not like. And we overlook the good things. These are the things that bring us happiness, or pleasure, or security, or comfort, or humour.

If we focus only on the bad things, it colours our thinking, our mental well being, and our whole appreciation of the relationship.

If we remember the upside, the good things, including the reasons why we first fell in love with our current partner, then our commitment to the relationship and to finding solutions, can increase.

Sometimes it will be necessary to explore, to take risks, to think outside the square. Some good reading could include Esther Perel’s thought-provoking book “Mating in Captivity”, or Bill and Pam Farrell’s book “Red Hot Monogamy” which provides a Christian slant on nurturing sex in a monogamous relationship, or Linda DeViller’s “Love Skills” which provides hands-on exercises for committed couples.

Most importantly, prioritize each other. Make time for your relationship. Schedule good-quality, stress free time.

It is an investment in the health of your relationship, in your commitment to each other, and also in your own wellbeing.

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