

Key to a satisfying sex life after 5, 10, 20 years? Variety.



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Balancing Act

Couples who inject a little variety into their sex lives over the years are just as sexually satisfied as they were during the first six months of their relationship, according to the one of the largest studies ever to examine what contributes to a satisfying sex life long term.

Just about everyone agrees that sexual satisfaction is an important component in long-term relationships, lead author David Frederick, assistant professor in health psychology at Chapman University, told me Tuesday. "Who we choose to be our partner, how we get along with our partner and our sex life with that partner are such a central part of our lives."

The study looked at 38,747 married or co-habiting heterosexual couples who had been together three or more years. The men and women ranged in age from 18 to 65 and many had been together for two decades or more. (Frederick said a similar study on same-sex couples is in the works.)

"If properly nurtured, passion can last for decades," the study states. "Nearly two-thirds of sexually satisfied respondents reported that their sex lives now were as passionate as in their early days together. Over one-third of sexually satisfied men and women selected 'passionate' as the single best word (out of six) to describe their most recent sexual encounter."

And check this out: Kids don't necessarily wreck your sex life. "How many kids were living in the house wasn't really related to sexual satisfaction at all," Frederick said. "Just having kids in the house didn't seem to matter as much as other things like mood setting, frequency of sex, consistency of orgasm, how well a couple communicates."



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The biggest predictor of long-term satisfaction is willingness to try new things. Close to half of all couples — satisfied and dissatisfied — read sexual self-help books and magazine articles, according to the study. "But what set sexually satisfied couples apart was that they actually tried some of the ideas," Frederick said.

"If you have sex three times a week with your partner, that's more than 150 times per year," he said. (An epitaph, this guy.) "Over 10 years you've had sex with your partner 1,500 times. There's a lot of potential for it to become habitual or routine. But trying novel things can really help in the sexual realm."

Frederick cited an unrelated study that determined couples who participated together in obstacle courses and other unusual activities reported feeling happier and more positive toward each other.

It's not so different in the bedroom. (Or those other rooms. Novelty?)

In general, the results indicate that couples who prioritize each other's satisfaction and can confide in each other with new ideas — without fear of judgment or rejection — fare the best.

Satisfied men and women were more likely than dissatisfied men and women to say they did one of the following: tried a new sexual position, wore sexy lingerie, took a

shower or bath together, talked about or acted out fantasies, gave or had a massage, went on a romantic getaway or used a sex toy together.

Couples who stayed satisfied long-term also reported more frequently setting a romantic mood by lighting candles or playing music, and were more likely to communicate about their feelings for each other, such as saying "I love you" during sex or sending flirty texts during the day.

They also found that sexually satisfied men and women gave and received more oral sex, had more consistent orgasms and engaged in more frequent sex.

Isn't that just one a bit of a chick-en/egg thing, I asked Frederick?

"There is definitely a bi-directional relationship," he said. "Generally it spirals: If you say your sex life is predictable, that makes you less satisfied and that makes you avoid sex. Your attitude about sex can fuel both satisfaction and dissatisfaction."

As with most things in life, it all comes down to your attitude. (And your willingness to try some kinky stuff.)

The study, co-authored by Janet Lever of California State University, Los Angeles, Brian Gillespie of Sonoma State University and Justin Garcia of the Kinsey Institute at Indiana University, will appear in *The Journal of Sex Research* next week.

Study: 3 reasons why Americans have shorter life spans

BY STEVEN REINBERG
HealthDay

A new study finds shootings, car crashes and drug overdoses contribute to a two-year gap in life expectancy.

Car crashes, shootings and drug overdoses, which cause more than 100,000 deaths a year in the United States, may explain why Americans' life expectancy is lower than in similar countries, a new study suggests.

Americans' life expectancy is about two years shorter than residents of Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom. For U.S. men, that difference translates into 76.4 years versus 78.6 years, while it means 81.2 years versus 83.4 years for women, the researchers reported.

"About 50 percent of the gap for men and about 20 percent for women is due just to those three causes of injury," said lead researcher Andrew Fenelon. He is a senior service fellow at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics.

Although shootings, car crashes and drug overdoses account for only about 4 percent of U.S. deaths overall, they are a large part of why American life expectancy is lower than in similar countries, especially among younger people, he said.

"When young people die, they lose many more years of life than older people, so the things that kill younger people may be more important for life expectancy," Fenelon said.

Fenelon's team found that shootings accounted for 21 percent of the gap for men, while drug poisonings accounted for 14 percent, and car crashes accounted for 13 percent.

Among women, these causes accounted for 19 percent of the gap, with 4 percent from shootings, 9 percent from drug poisonings, and 6 percent from car crashes, according to the report. All three causes accounted for 6 percent of deaths among men and 3 percent among women. The U.S. death rate from injuries was greater than in any of the comparison countries, the researchers added.

"If we reduced deaths from these causes, we would gain back about a year of life expectancy," Fenelon said. "I don't know how to do it."

The report was published Feb. 9 in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*. For the study, the researchers used data from the U.S. National Vital Statistics System and the World Health Organization Mortality Database, and calculated death rates by age, gender and cause for the United States and the 12 comparison countries.

Dr. David Katz, president of the American College of Lifestyle Medicine, said, "We have long had clear evidence that life expectancy in the U.S. lags behind many of our peer countries around the world, and here we are told why."

"There are ongoing efforts, in both law enforcement and engineering, to reduce the toll of car crashes. The nation is slowly, but inexorably, directing more attention to the crisis of drug abuse. Whether or not the cold, hard calculus of epidemiology is enough to provoke meaningful action related to guns remains to be seen," said Katz, who's also director of the Yale University Prevention Research Center in New Haven, Conn.

"This epidemiologic, and humanist, certainly hopes so," he added.