Don’t bother trying to rekindle your marriage

There is a popular belief in the marriage and relationship world that when the doldrums hit and you find yourself more numb than really alive, you should look for ways to get back what you once had. Call it a spark. A zest. A passion. Whatever. The point is, something’s missing and since you once had it – you can go back and find it again.

Wrong.

Life is not lived backwards. Our past is important. Who we once were is what our spouse found attractive (since that person caught the eye of your spouse and reeled them in the rest of the way). But the previous version of you is long gone and trying to go back and find him/her is a path to more frustration.

While you may be able to produce a brief spark by reminiscing about when you were dating, it won’t be a lasting spark.

The Problem

The main reason – you’re up against the fugacious “love drug” in your brain. When you first met and fell in love with your spouse you both experienced a chemically induced high.

Your brain flooded with a chemical called Phenylethylamine (PEA), which remains in your brain from 6 months to 2 years. PEA produces a feeling of euphoria, a sense of belonging, and a feeling of obsession (which is why you want to talk and be with your new found love every moment). As PEA fades over time (and it will) many people believe that you can recreate the same levels of emotion within the relationship. Problem is, you can’t.

You cannot go back and manufacture PEA in your brain within the same relationship (although I’m sure the pharmaceutical companies are trying to figure out a way).

The Solution

What you can do, much better than finding another partner, is to increase the levels of the perdurable “love drug” Oxytocin in your system.

Oxytocin is known as the “bonding” chemical. It produces the deep connection to others, the lasting bond that long term relationships create. Oxytocin is released when you bond with another person – the most intense experiences are mother and infant while nursing and during orgasm. But other contacts create this bond as well: massages, eye contact, hugs, holding hands etc..

On the other end of the spectrum, going through crisis and tragedy together, dramatically increases the levels of Oxytocin as well.

This is why it is worth it to work through the rough patches in marriage. What it produces is a deeper, more lasting bond.

Building (rather than rekindling) your marriage

Now that you know what you’re up against when you face the monotonous times in marriage, here’s a few tested and proven recommendations to help build up the Oxytocin in your life:

1. Catch romance where you can

You can learn to build romance at unexpected times — during your daily commute, while doing laundry — you can even do this through a long, lingering kiss or just holding hands.

In other words, the next time you find you’ve got a couple of minutes to yourselves, make use of it — give that Oxytocin a boost.

2. Nurture your separate selves

Having your own hobbies isn’t a sign you are drifting apart. On the contrary, developing individual interests allows for a richer life as a couple. Taking personal responsibility for your own well-being relieves your spouse of the pressure to “provide” happiness — so go ahead and nurture some solo

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adventures. That’ll also keep each of you stocked with plenty of adventures to chat about, which also strengthens your bond.

3. Take on a project together
Separate interests aside, exploring new ground together is also important since it builds a history of shared experiences (Oxytocin boost). Commit to a daily walk together. Create a project for your home or children. Plant a garden together. Big projects – together – increase Oxytocin because they are often filled with highs and lows, but the lows will create a bond as well. Couples who take on adventures together, get a sense of daring and accomplishment that can really kick up their chemistry!

4. Share spiritually
If you have a faith, don’t keep it to yourself. Talking and listening together with the one we love about those spiritual things that we believe deep down within our being, can create intimate Oxytocin-boosting moments. Praying together is a very precious bonding experience not to be dismissed. Every day, actively look for blessings and the workings of your God in your life and in the lives of others. Then at the close of the day sit together, hold hands and quietly share with your spouse at least one way you have been blessed that day. Reciprocate.

5. Daily Dialogue and Compliments
Engaging in a Daily Dialogue and giving Daily Compliments are two ways of keeping your relationship exciting and healthy according to the Prepare/Enrich Marriage Enrichment Program. While these exercises may seem awkward at first, the more you share your feelings, the easier it will become to do so.

The focus of the Daily Dialogue is on your feelings about each other and your shared life together. Set aside five minutes per day and 15 minutes on the weekends to discuss:
- what was dissatisfying about your relationship that day
- what you most enjoyed about your relationship that day

Giving at least one Daily Compliment to your partner will help you focus on your strengths as individuals. It will also highlight those positive things that attracted you to each other. Daily compliments will prevent your relationship from becoming routine and make it more mutually satisfying. Another Oxytocin-booster.

6. Surprise one another
A letter in his lunchbox, a love note on her pillow, a text message or telephone call in the middle of the day, a Valentines card in mid-November, completing an over-due household project, a gift or flowers without it being a special occasion, an “I Love You” card in the mail, doing a chore for him or her, breakfast in bed, initiating a surprise hug, a “stolen” kiss, a surprise foot massage or backrub or affirming/praising your spouse in front of others.

7. Touch each other (both sexually and non-sexually)
The boost of connection you receive from human touch is huge. And every touch doesn’t have to be sexual in nature. Sure, sexual touch is important and will increase the connection, but so will non-sexual touch. Hold hands, hug, sit close beside one another, cuddle. Each little (or big) gesture can cause a boost of Oxytocin for both of you. Couples who spend more time hugging and kissing also have got lower levels of stress hormones in their bodies. Cortisol is responsible for several stress-related changes in the body and is secreted in higher levels during the body’s fight or flight response to stress. Researchers from the University of Zurich in Switzerland under Dr Beate Ditzen studied 51 German couples for one week, and found those who reported more physical contact, from holding hands to sexual intercourse, had lower levels of cortisol, the so-called stress hormone.