

7 Habits of Happily Married Couples

By Dr. Mercola

Your personal relationships are incredibly important and can make or break your physical and emotional health. Marriage, or any similar long-term relationship, in particular can benefit or harm your health, depending on whether it's a happy marriage or not.

One recent study found marriage was one of only two life events (out of a total of eight) that had positive effects on physical health (the other was a new job or promotion).¹ However, an analysis of 64 studies showed that marital functioning is consequential for health; that is, a negative marriage may negatively influence health while the opposite holds true for a positive marriage.

That study found that an unhappy marriage could indirectly influence health outcomes by increasing the risk of [depression](#) and unhealthy habits while directly influencing cardiovascular, endocrine and immune system health and more.²

Still other research found older women's risk of death increased in the presence of "low-quality marital interaction,"³ while research published in the journal *Physiology & Behavior* revealed the pathways by which a negative marriage could lead to negative health outcomes:⁴

"... [N]egative and hostile behaviors during marital conflict discussions are related to elevations in cardiovascular activity, alterations in hormones related to stress and dysregulation of immune function."

7 Secrets of Happily Married Couples

In 2014, fewer than 60 percent of married couples said they were "very happy" with their marriage.⁵ Aside from the negative effects on your physical health, it's safe to say that a happy relationship is better for your mental and emotional well-being as well.

What are the secrets to a happy marriage? In many cases, they're similar to those that help you [find overall happiness](#) and typically include making a choice to be happy. Marriages take work to maintain, like any relationship, but small, simple acts and choices made on a daily basis act up to building a happier existence.

Dave Willis, pastor and author of the book "The Seven Laws of Love," shared the following secrets of happily married couples with *Time*.⁶ You'll likely find that following this advice in your own relationship will lead to positive changes.

1. Communicate Throughout the Day

Happy couples make a point to talk throughout the day. Sharing those seemingly mundane details about your lunch or updates about how an appointment or meeting went help you to stay connected.

If you can't talk throughout the day, at least try to send a text message or two and make a point to re-connect at the end of your day. Willis said of his own marriage:⁷

"We don't compartmentalize our life into 'work' and 'marriage,' but we see our marriage as something that transcends the compartments and connects into everything we do in our work, our hobbies, our free time and our home time. Communication is a vital ingredient to a happy, healthy marriage."

2. Develop a Financial Plan

Financial stress is a leading cause of divorce, so sit down with your partner and come up with a financial plan you can both agree on.

It helps to talk about both long-term and short-term goals and then brainstorm strategies to reach them. Once you've got your plan, communicate regularly about your spending and savings.

3. Be Mentally Monogamous

Most couples agree to be physically monogamous, but partners may stray mentally via fantasies, pornography or investing emotionally in another person. Willis explained:⁸

"Our fantasies will shape our realities. We need to be physically monogamous but we also need to be mentally monogamous. This one might be the most difficult task on the list because it takes constant vigilance, but it's well worth the effort."

As a guy who used to struggle with porn, I know the damage porn can do. Stay away from it. Stay focused on your spouse."

4. Stay Respectful During Disagreements

It's inevitable that you'll have arguments during your marriage. The way you argue can make the difference between a productive conversation and outcome and one that drives a wedge between you.

Willis advises couples to avoid insulting or devaluing each other and speaking in respectful, non-hurtful tones. "We're each going to have our own opinions and

sometimes we won't see eye-to-eye, but even in disagreements, healthy couples show mutual respect," he says.⁹

5. Share Your True Thoughts and Feelings

Staying honest with your partner about how you're feeling will promote intimacy in your relationship.

Recognize that your partner cannot read your mind, and sharing your thoughts will help avoid unnecessary frustration on both of your parts. The more you open up to each other, the more you can come together.

6. Make Your Marriage a Priority

You're probably being dragged in many different directions between your marriage, career, kids, hobbies and extended family. However, it's important to prioritize your marriage ahead of virtually everything.

Make time for you and your spouse to do things together, connect and enjoy being a couple. While many couples are reluctant to make marriage a priority once they have kids, doing so will demonstrate a loving relationship that will make your children's lives fuller. Willis says:¹⁰

"Have the kind of marriage that makes your kids want to get married someday. Don't wind up with an empty nest and an empty marriage at the same time.

Prioritize the marriage even while your kids are young. You'll be better spouses, and ironically, you'll actually be better parents too."

7. Get Rid of Your Exit Strategies

In order to be fully committed to your marriage, you need to remove even the slightest suggestion of divorce or starting a new life apart. If one or both partners are mulling over exit strategies, the marriage is bound to fail.

As Willis says, " ... [M]arriage can only work when there's a lifelong commitment ... The strength of your commitment will determine the strength of your marriage."

More Simple Ways to Strengthen Your Relationship

If your relationship could use a boost, you may want to consider couples counseling to overcome hurdles that are keeping you apart. However, you can also try the following strategies, which can be done easily if you're willing to make the effort.

Hug More

[Hugging](#) increases levels of the “love hormone” oxytocin, helping with bonding and intimacy. Oxytocin decreases the level of stress hormones (primarily cortisol) your body manufactures and lowers your blood pressure response to anxiety-producing events. Oxytocin quite likely plays a role in why couples live longer than singles, and hugs also help to cultivate patience.

A full-body hug even stimulates your nervous system while decreasing feelings of loneliness, combating fear, increasing self-esteem, defusing tension and showing appreciation, which are all bonuses for your relationship.¹¹

Have Sex Once a Week

[How often do happy couples have sex?](#) One study found couples who had sex once a week reported the highest levels of happiness, and this did not increase with more frequent sex.¹²

While having sex more often — four times a week or more — wasn’t a bad thing, it didn’t lead to additional happiness compared to having sex once a week. For couples who may feel obligated to have sex more often just because they think they should, this study takes off some of the pressure.

The researchers revealed that sex leads to increased happiness among couples because it boosts feelings of satisfaction with the relationship. Like hugs, sex and orgasms also result in increased levels of the hormone oxytocin, which helps you feel bonded to your partner.

Make Kissing a Priority

After you’ve been in a relationship for a while, simple acts like [kissing](#) may fall by the wayside. But, like hugging and sex, kissing prompts your brain to release a happy elixir of feel-good chemicals like serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin.

This isn’t only important for your happiness, it also may help to strengthen your relationship. Research revealed, for instance, that people who spent six weeks making kissing a priority with their partners reported significant decreases in their levels of stress.

In addition to improvements in stress, the kissing participants also reported greater relationship satisfaction.¹³ Another study even found that men who received a passionate kiss before they left for work earned more money.¹⁴ This suggests the kiss (and perhaps the happy home-life that goes along with it) makes people and relationships happier and more productive.

Recognize Individual as Well as Joint Goals

In marriage, you and your partner are on the same team, but you're still both individuals. The happiest relationships are those that can find a balance between what Tom Murray, Ph.D., a marriage and family therapist, calls "we-ness" and "me-ness."¹⁵ You each have your own desires and needs. Come together to figure out how you can each support and complement each other's lives as individuals while still working together to achieve mutual, shared goals.

Be Careful With Technology

Technology comes with many pitfalls that can shake even a strong relationship. Social media promotes the idea that there's always something better out there, which can lead to temptations to flirt or re-connect with old flames.

Even without the increased availability of "other options" is the ease of finding your social support and stimulation online instead of with your partner. It's also easy to spend hours on your computer or phone instead of re-connecting with your partner.

It's possible to use technology and have a happy marriage, but boundaries should be followed and it's a good idea to "unplug" for at least a couple of hours each day so you and your partner can connect without distraction.

Finally, don't underestimate the power of showing your partner appreciation, which may come in the form of sharing household responsibilities equally. One survey found that sharing household chores was ranked very high in importance for making a marriage work — behind only faithfulness and a happy sex life.¹⁶

So if your relationship could use a boost and you've covered some of the other bases already, try taking a practical look at how you can make your partner's life easier by sharing responsibilities and showing appreciation.