

How can we make sure that 2020 is a better year for our couple relationship?

Already into the third week of the New Year, how many of us are still going strong with our new year's resolutions to do dry January or Veganuary, to do more exercise and eat less sugar? How many of us have found the novelty has worn off all too easily and returned to our old habits? How many of us are going to make 2020 the year when we prioritise our relationship and put it at the top of our to-do list rather than at the bottom?

Dr Rangan Chatterjee GP, writer and resident BBC Breakfast Doctor believes it's the small changes that can make a big difference. In his recent new book *Feel Better in 5* he confidently suggests that by introducing three simple practices called *Health Snacks* into your daily routine, none taking longer than 5 minutes to complete, will bring real benefit.

Each *Health Snack* focuses on a different aspect of your health: Mind, Body and Heart ensuring that you are taking care of your whole self.

He explains so clearly how we are all creatures of habit. Research suggests that almost half of all the activities we engage in over the course of a day are done out of habit. We don't think twice about cleaning our teeth every morning and making a morning cup of tea. These simple everyday activities which we do without thinking can be very powerful and have more affect over our health and well being than large and occasional activities. So how do we incorporate new habits into our everyday lives? Again research shows that for habits to become part of new behaviours they have to be easy and we need to start small.

This got me thinking about how this approach could be tailored for couples who come to therapy feeling their relationship is not prioritised, in a rut and they're going on separate paths.

Here are my *Health Snack* suggestions that can bring benefits to your relationship:

Mind

- If we don't take care of our own worries and concerns it can impact negatively on our relationship. You can do this if you:
- Download your stress and anxiety out of your brain by taking 5 minutes preferably every morning on waking to write them all down. Downloading regularly will contribute to you starting the day with a calmer clearer mind.

- Spend 5 minutes each day enjoying nature together whether through sight, sound or smell. Research shows just going out barefoot onto grass can bring positive health benefit.
- Go with the flow – allow yourself to be absorbed in something that calms and quietens down your mind. This may be doing a crossword, or Sudoku, listening to your favourite piece of music.
- Focus on your breathing together whether lying in bed, lying on the floor or sitting in a chair. Place one hand on your tummy and one on your chest. Just focus on taking a deep breath through your nose and then letting it go. With each inhale and exhale pay attention to where your breath comes in and out of your body. Repeat for 5 minutes.

Body

Making our bodies stronger hugely contributes to our feelings of wellbeing. Getting motivated can be difficult but setting aside regular time to exercise together will make it more likely that you keep the consistency going. Think about doing them:

- as soon as you wake up
- In the kitchen whilst you wait for the kettle to boil
- Before lunch either at home or work
- As soon as you get home from work
- Before dinner
- Before going to bed

There are so many exercises available to suit everyone's ability. You don't have to be an expert to exercise but its important to slow down and enjoy some time for yourself. You don't need to belong to a fancy gym to exercise together it can be done in your home, here are some ideas:

- Jogging on the spot
- Jumping Jacks
- Press-ups
- Squats
- Put some music on and dance together

Heart

According to Dr Chaterjee, our hearts enable us to feel love, to connect with others and to connect us to ourselves. Good connections are vital to our well-being and never more so than in our partnerships. The harsh realities of modern life mean that we often neglect to prioritise time with our partners, turning, instead, to modern technology to provide our needs which can have

devastating consequences. Five minutes a day nurturing your relationship can have hugely beneficial affects. Try these:

- Instead of focusing on all the things that irritate and annoy you about your partner, take time to write down 5 things that you love about your partner. This regular routine can refocus negative thinking into more positive feelings, bringing more calm and patience to the relationship
- It's the simple everyday things that can make the biggest difference: how we greet each other, show kindness respect and appreciation. What tone of voice and words we use with each other.
- Energy and commitment is required on both sides to make your relationship the best it can be
- Taking regular time to check out with your partner whether you feel supported and loved. What is it you both bring to the relationship and is it what your partner needs?
- The need to stop what you are doing and make time for each other at the end of the day. How important is it to feel you come first for your partner?

Put away electronic distractions and be more present with each other. Listen and be attentive and interested in each other. Try not to interrupt when the other is speaking and don't try to problem-solve. Here are some ideas:

Think about a daily act of kindness towards your partner

How do you show that you are still curious about each other?

- Focus on your partner's strengths rather than their weakness.
- Be less critical and more complimentary.
- Write down 5 things that you are grateful for from your partner.
- Take time out to consider the impact of showing and receiving physical affection

Of course, the New Year will bring challenges – that is part and parcel of being in a relationship. With a shared desire to use *5-minute Health Snacks* to add new habits to your relationship, you are on your way to a more loving and fulfilling relationship for 2020.

If you would like to discuss things further or to make an appointment, you can call me on 07976 403741 or (020) 8959 9528. Alternatively you can contact me by email: dawn.kaffel@couplescounselling.com.

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