

ANTI-AGE YOUR RELATIONSHIP

If your sex life is stuck in a rut and romance is a long-lost memory, our expert guide will freshen things up

By Helen Russell

Tired, dull and in need of some TLC? It's not just your skin that needs anti-ageing treatments - your relationship wants in on the action, too. Whether it's been six months or 16 years, we all need to take care of our love life.

"Once the honeymoon period is over, things can become boring," says sex therapist and Relate relationship counsellor Denise Knowles. "But just because the buzz has gone, it doesn't mean things are over. You just need to work at keeping the spark alive."

So, how can you smooth out the blemishes and stop the sagging? Here comes the science part...

LIBIDO LAUNCHERS

♥ **DON'T SKIP MEALS** Low blood sugar is a prime suspect when it comes to getting the grumps and loss of libido. "A healthy diet is important for good nerve function, hormone production and blood flow, which are essential for a healthy sex life," says Dr Áine O'Connor of the British Nutrition Foundation.

♥ **GET SOME EXERCISE** A US study found that women are more easily aroused after a strenuous workout. Download the Fitocracy app (free, iTunes), which gives you workout suggestions tailored to your personal fitness levels.

♥ **BECOME A BEDROOM BOOKWORM** The *Journal Of Sex Research* found that women who read romantic novels make love with their partners 74 per cent more

often than those who don't. Try Samantha Young's raunchy best-seller *Down London Road* (£7.99, Penguin) or for more practical advice, read Sarah Litvinoff's *The Relate Guide To Sex In Loving Relationships* (£8.99, Vermilion).

♥ **SEND HIM A SEXY TEXT** Remember how exciting it was back in the day when you were waiting for him to call? Exactly! This is why Denise recommends going old school to organise your liaisons. "Schedule in date nights to make spending couple-time non-negotiable, and keep in touch during the day so when you finally do get together, the spark's already lit." The *Between* app (free, iTunes) lets you share flirty messages, voice memos and photos privately to get you in the mood for bedroom adventures.

FORWARD-THINKING FIXES

♥ **PLAN AHEAD** "Major life stages, such as changing jobs or moving house can make things bumpy," says Denise. "Try writing down where you see your relationship heading, mapping any changes you might want to make in advance." If you're prepared, you can sweat the bad stuff together.

♥ **BE CASH SMART** Draw up a financial plan so you can get on top of any money issues (redundancy, maternity leave etc) as they arise. The *Household Budget Manual* (69p, iTunes) has some great tips for couples, such as how you can afford holidays while still saving for a rainy day.





BOND BOOSTERS

♥ **START THE DAY WITH A SNOG** "Kissing is really important in a relationship - the more passionate the better," says Denise. "Really go for it, as kissing releases oxytocin, a hormone that makes us happy, reduces stress and encourages men to be more affectionate and less likely to cheat." If you're not a fan of PDAs when you're out and about, hand-holding or cuddling is good too.

♥ **DO HIS HAIR** "Try grooming one another, like monkeys do," says sexologist Dr Fran Fisher. "Sit behind your partner and gently stroke and comb their hair for 10 minutes before switching around. This really helps with bonding and brings back some of that early relationship chemistry, as it reignites the animal instincts embedded within us all." Take it to the next level with the Genie Head Massager, £4.95, Tesco.com - it's not nicknamed an "orgasmatron" for nothing!

♥ **HAVE A GIGGLE** Making time to laugh together can give your relationship a boost, and a study by the University of Stirling found that funny people are seen as more attractive. Download 9GAG (free, iTunes) for daily jokes to share with your other half. LOL-cano.

♥ **DO SOMETHING LOVING** Whether it's sticking a Post-It note to the fridge reminding your partner that they're awesome or making a secret playlist of "your" songs on their iPod, the little things all add up to one big happily ever after.

♥ **TELL HIM WHAT'S BOTHERING YOU** If you're feeling irritated by your other half, first check out what else is going on around you. "Perhaps you're tired or stressed, meaning your tolerance levels are below par," says Denise. "If it really is your partner that's the problem, tell them how you're feeling." Don't blame them, own your feelings instead. Say: "I feel!" instead of "You make me feel". This way, they won't feel threatened and you'll be able to discuss the problem calmly.

MEN - TAKE NOTE!

It's not just the ladies who should make the effort. Gents, keep your love life fresh with these tips:

♥ **SHAPE UP** More gym sessions = more (and better) sex. "Studies show that sedentary men who started exercising had an improved sex life and more satisfying orgasms," says relationships expert Dr Marianne Fisher of Saint Mary's University in the US.

♥ **SAY SOMETHING NICE** Remember how you complimented your partner all the time at the start of the relationship? Keep this up!" says Denise. Research has found that happy couples gave each other five compliments to every one criticism.

♥ **AND RELAX!** Massage can reduce stress and boost body image, so give your partner a rub down to get both of you in the mood for a happy ending. **F**

Fyi

It's time to shop for love!



♥ **Salmon**

Packed with essential omega-3 fatty acids to help with the production of sex hormones.



♥ **Ginger**

Improves blood flow to sexual organs, enhancing stimulation and arousal.



♥ **Leafy greens**

Help balance female hormones to maintain a healthy sex drive.



♥ **Pine nuts**

Rich in zinc to stimulate libido.



♥ **Chocolate**

Contains theobromine to get the blood pumping and increase the sensitivity of nerve endings, as well as mood-boosting phenylethylamine.