



Will it get him to do the dishes next time? Maybe.

Sex can fix it!

A little bedroom (or kitchen) fun can be like Krazy Glue for your relationship. Here's proof from the best experts: you.
By Erin Zammett Ruddy

Sex can help you deal with everything from stress to fat days.

The other day, my husband and I were bickering about how he loads the dishwasher—clichéd and stupid, yet contentious enough to make us both sweat. After a few venomous rounds, he huffed that he was going for a drive. When I finished rinsing entire meals from the plates he'd stacked the wrong way, I started to compose a text that laid out why he is such a jerk. Then I stopped and wrote this instead: "I'm sorry. Come home so we can have sex before the kids wake up from their naps." He did, we did, and the rest of the day went off without a hitch. We were calmer, kinder, less on edge. It was like we'd both taken happy pills and all the excess noise (and there is a lot of it in our house) faded away.

You're wondering how I got from wanting to throttle my husband to hopping in bed with him, right? I'll be honest: I was inspired by the experts and women I interviewed to find out what sex could and couldn't do for a relationship. I've always known that we get along better when

we're having lots of sex, but I'd never tried the quickie fix. It's the antidote to the snapping, nitpicking, nasty-talk trap we sometimes fall into. "Sex can smooth out so many bumps in the road," says Linda Banner, Ph.D., a sex therapist and researcher in San Jose, CA. "It's good for you, him, and your relationship."

Basically, sex arms you with positive vibes toward your partner, thanks to the release of the bonding hormone oxytocin. But beyond working wonders in the immediate, wand-waving way, sex also plays a powerful role in the big picture of a relationship. "It's the cement in a marriage—studies prove that there is a direct correlation between physical intimacy and emotional satisfaction," Banner says. On the flip side, if there are bigger problems in a relationship, sex is the most obvious place it will show up; deep anger or resentment can manifest as a lack of desire, she explains. If you're having a major communication breakdown (more serious than, say, a difference in dishwasher-loading techniques), sex probably isn't the answer. But if you two are solid, regularly jumping in the sack together can help you deal with everything from money stress to fat days. Not convinced? Keep reading, and you will be. ►

Sex can fix... *a big blowup*

Every once in a while, you have an argument so heated that even when you make up, the tension lingers. Jo, 34, and her fiancé discovered this after a war of words on her birthday. "It involved our mothers and had been brewing for a while, so it got nasty," she says. "We apologized, but that night while we watched TV, the fight was still hanging in the air." That's when Jo had what seemed like a radical idea. Rather than let the awkwardness remain and cause a potentially damaging riff, why not get right to the make-up sex? So Jo asked him to make love to her. "He was surprised but happy," she says, "and the tension vanished." Bonus: The adrenaline and competition of an epic fight can translate into serious passion. The only caveat, says Logan Levkoff, Ph.D., a New York City sex educator and author of *Third Base Ain't What It Used to Be*: Don't rush it. "If you're still steaming, you'll feel so disconnected from the sex that it could do more damage than good. After, you may feel resentful and wind up being angry with yourself and him. But if the major issues are resolved, make-up sex is a great way to clear the air."

Sex can fix... *general crankiness*

Lucy, 32, a New York City newlywed, realized the power of getting it regularly when she and her husband went through a dry spell during the first trimester of her pregnancy. "I was so exhausted that we weren't having much sex, and it showed—we were cranky and had less patience," she says. "Once I felt better and we got back to our usual routine, it was like, 'Ahhh, you're wonderful.' The snippy fights went away." Courtney, 33, from Detroit, concurs: "Even when my husband is driving me crazy, having sex can make me forget I was ever mad. Maybe it's just the hormones, but it works every time!"

Sex can fix... *a lagging libido*

It may seem counterintuitive, but studies show that the more a woman has

sex, the more she wants sex. "It's not just the physical libido at play, but having sex reminds you, *Oh, right, I like pleasure! Intimacy is good!* As busy women, we often forget this," Levkoff explains. Marion, 31, a mother of two in Huntington, NY, completely agrees: "My husband and I are feast or famine when it comes to sex," she says. "But I think about it—and want it—way more when we're in feast mode. I find myself getting the kids to bed earlier so I can be ready when he comes home. It becomes a craving."

Sex can fix... *the lure of temptation*

When Marie, 35, a mother of two in Ormond Beach, FL, started getting Facebook messages from an ex-boyfriend, it messed with her head. "I started thinking about this guy way more than I should have," she admits. "I even dragged my friends to a bar because I thought he would be there." One night soon after, her husband wanted to have sex and she turned him down—and immediately realized she needed to get a handle on things. "I thought, *What am I doing? I love this man. I love my life.* The next night I initiated it, and for the rest of the week we had a ton of sex. It was just the thing to snap me back to reality. I didn't want some other guy—I just wanted some excitement!"

Sex can fix... *stress freakouts*

"When you're a busy working woman, or married with kids, or all of the above, it's so easy to forget that having sex is even important," Levkoff says. "But whether it's five minutes or an hour, sex can truly relieve the stress of all your to-dos." Just like any type of exercise, getting physical in bed works tension out of the muscles, and the exertion calms your mind. Add to that the burst of feel-good endorphins you get during orgasm and you've got a magic tension cure. "Because I work with a lot of people on the East Coast, I wake up every morning to dozens of emails," says Kathleen, 28, from San Diego. "Usually I wind up yelling at my crappy coffeemaker or the



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car in front of me on the way to work. But on mornings that start off with a romp, I don't even notice that stuff. If the coffee doesn't brew, I make tea!" I can attest to this one too. My husband and I throw a huge holiday party every year, and during the week leading up to it, I'm a crazy woman. Rather than heating up the bedroom, I lie there panicking about hypothetical problems. But last year, on the day of the party, I made a point of "reconnecting" with my husband. Having sex with him reminded me that there are more important things in life than what the \$!?!@ we'll do if we run out of champagne.

Sex can fix... *body blahs*

"The other day, the bathroom scale informed me that I had gained three

pounds, so I got in the shower pouting," says Sarah, 33, of Starkville, MS. "Then my husband jumped in, and let me tell you, morning shower sex can turn a bad day around!" Afterward, she looked in the mirror and "I definitely didn't feel frumpy. I was glowing!" she says. Sex is especially great for post-kid body image, says Levkoff: "It shows us that we're still desirable, not just a leftover body with extra stretch marks." Kristin, 34, a mom who runs a cookie business out of her home near Boston, is proof: "The biggest thing for me is that sex can make me feel beautiful still. I spend so much time in sweatpants, covered in dough, that sometimes I forget! But hearing my husband say how hot I am keeps me in touch with that part of myself."

Sex can fix... *kid overload*

Got kids? Then sex is even more essential, Banner says: "It's the perfect reminder that you're sexual beings, not just two people running a household together." Despite having a 10-month-old who often sleeps in their bed, Taylor, 26, of Austin, TX, and her husband have kept their sex life intact. "It's all about the quickie—we snag it when and where we can to keep in touch with the 'adults only' part of our relationship." Christi, 33, of Knoxville, TN, makes sure to initiate sex at least once a week for the same reason. "After being home with two kids all day, I'm tired and usually *think* I'm all touched out," she says. "But once things get going, I always say, 'We have got to do this more often!'" That's how we all feel after a mind-blowing—or even just pretty good—roll in the sack. So if you're lying in bed next to your guy and reading this, put down REDBOOK! You know what to do. ☺

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