

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

factoid

The most frequent complaint that brings people to sex therapy is a lack of interest in sex. (Giargiari, et al., *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 2005)

Q. Does sex typically cause extra stress in pre-marital relationships?

A. Some people believe that sex is a great stress reducer. Others argue that sex can be a problematic factor that ratchets up stress levels. And it may depend on how each partner perceives themselves and the sexual relationship. Ask yourself: Does sex enhance or disturb our relationship? Is sex usually a positive or a negative experience? Was it as good for you as it was for me?

In our lives, expectations have a lot to do with our satisfaction – whether it is in a job, organization, UA classroom, or relationship. If our expectations are met or exceeded, we're usually happy. If expectations are not met, we might be mildly disappointed or totally stressed out. When you factor sex (and accompanying emotions) into a growing relationship, the equation is complicated by the differing viewpoints that each partner may hold about the role that sex plays in that relationship.

Let's look at how sex might cause stress in a pre-marital relationship between two college students. Think about all the expectations and issues that have potential to cause stress, such as:

- Differences in the desire for sex or frequency of sex
- Performance anxiety or difficulties
- Self-concept and body image
- Fear of sexually transmitted diseases or pregnancy
- Potential lack of privacy for sexual relations
- Inability to express feelings openly or having undeveloped communication skills
- Conflicting personal, family, or religious values (within a person or between partners)
- Unrealistic expectations of one's (or partners') performance

This is a short list. You can probably think of many other issues that could contribute to stress – and any of the topics listed above can affect married couples as well. Few people have a “stress-free” sex life. Sex can cause stress in ANY relationship: married or unmarried; gay or straight; friends with benefits. The key is how you handle the inevitable matters, disagreements, and stresses that are guaranteed to pop up in relationships.

If you would like to discuss relationship issues with a trained professional, contact Counseling and Psychological Services at 621-3334, or stop by their offices on the 3rd floor of the Highland Commons/Campus Health building.



Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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