## MATTERS OF THE HEART

An unhappy relationship really can break your heart – by increasing the risk of a heart attack by 8.5 percent. Researchers say there is growing evidence that our relationships have a dramatic effect on our health, as the latest study looked at 281 healthy adults and found those who are unhappily married or living with their partner have thicker carotid arteries and a higher risk of cardiovascular disease.
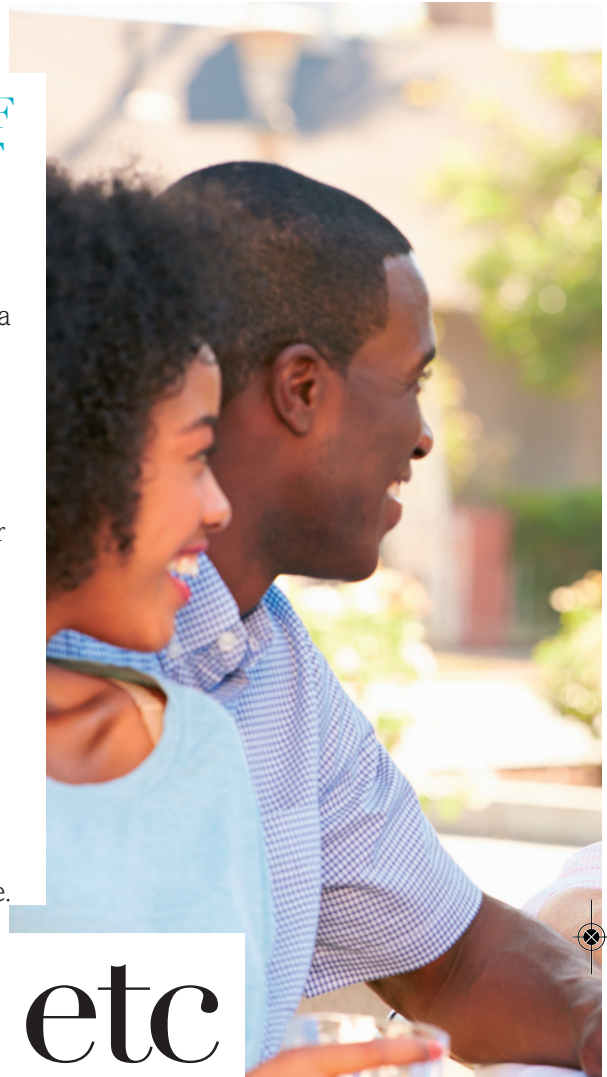
LIFE LOVE etc

Our monthly look at the world of love, friendship and sex

THE VOICE

A staggering 24 percent of Brits have fallen for someone simply because they found their voice so alluring, research suggests. Furthermore, 73 percent of people surveyed admitted it could make someone sexier even if they're not particularly good looking.

Soul SEARCHING

"We're too entwined"

Q "My partner and I are sensitive to each others moods and drag each other down. When one of us is feeling bad we become snappy and the negativity seems to spread. Help."

JAN DAY
Jan leads workshops focused on conscious relationships and sexuality. Her teaching has a deep understanding and a warm-hearted appreciation for people's need to find and learn to trust their own journeys. janday.com

A It sounds like you and your partner have become very merged. In a healthy relationship we need both integration and individuality, whether in physical space; time; interests; views; or opinions. Without that we'll become dull to each other.

Here are a few simple practices and exercises that you can do:

1. First, hug as if you are an A-frame, with your feet about 18 inches apart from each other and your chests touching. Stay there hugging for 3-5 minutes. You'll notice that it feels unstable, if one wobbles the other does too. This is a physical representation of your situation. Now try standing grounded with your weight squarely over your feet and come into a hug with your chests touching. Now that you are independent, even if your partner is unsteady, you're not unstable. Which feels better?

2. Choose a time when neither of you are feeling moody, and try to notice how your partner's feeling. Then bring your focus 100 percent back to yourself. Practice shifting your awareness back and forth, then try it out in more challenging situations. For the second stage, imagine you are creating an empathic wall around yourself. Adjust the strength of the wall until it's just strong enough to prevent you getting lost in

The LOVE CLINIC

OUR RESIDENT LOVE GURU ON FINDING YOUR HIDDEN CONTRACT

All relationships are based on open and covert dynamics. Most people have some sense of what it is about the other person which is attractive to them, and why they chose to be with their partner. We could call this the explicit contract because both parties know it exists.

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DISCOVER YOUR DYNAMICS

There are many forms, but it might look something like this: "I'm with you because you make me laugh and I enjoy your company and in return, I will tell you how funny you are and that makes you feel good". Another example could be: "You're hot and it makes me feel good to be with someone who I find sexy. I tell you this and this makes you feel good". Both people understand this is part of the relationship and make an unspoken commitment to abide by it.

However, what is more interesting is what lies deeper. It is these aspects, which I call hidden contracts that show up in abnormal situations and which can reveal a lot about the unseen workings within a relationship.

Let's take an example to show you what I mean. It might emerge when your man gets sick. If he's really ill and unable to operate normally, the explicit contract might not function typically – it's not easy to be funny or sexy if you're feeling at death's door.

So what could happen to the dynamics in such a case? Maybe your man stops being 'the provider' or 'the strong one' and instead becomes a needy child, looking for his mother to take care of him. It's probable that this was part of the relationship all along but things could have masked it.

CHANGE YOUR CONTRACT

What if your man is no longer able to tell you how sexy you look or make love to you? If part of your hidden pledge is that you get your sexual sense of self-worth from your man telling you how hot you are, and suddenly he is unable to do that, how does that feel? You may start to feel bad about yourself, blame him and get angry with him for getting sick.

However, when these patterns show up, don't despair. This is an opportunity to grow in your relationship and personally. Instead of relying on him to make you feel sexy, find the sexiness within yourself. Wear underwear that makes you feel good, maybe go and buy a new sex toy. Find the place within yourself that makes you feel good, and don't rely on your partner for that sense of self-worth.

So, even though these covert contracts can be uncomfortable when they're revealed, they are beautiful windows into a profounder way of relating. Explore them.

your partner's state, but still permeable enough to feel into him. Experiment with it being a very thin permeable membrane or a thick, solid sheet. This is something to really practice so don't worry if you can't do it the first time.

3. Take five minutes in turn to speak about a topic that your partner may think differently about. Next take it in turns to express ways that you are similar, and ways that you are different. Share how you feel at the end.

4. Review how much time you have alone or with others. Try developing a meditation or journal writing practice to build a stronger sense of self. Also look at how much time you spend on hobbies or interests with a wider group of friends. If your partner is your sole source of connection it is easy to become very dependent on them and the effect is just like the A frame hug.

DID YOU KNOW?
Women generally find men with 2-5 exes the most desirable, a study in the journal Human Nature *suggests.*

"People who sleep naked are happier in their relationships, a new study suggests."