



# Heart & soul

**Cate Mackenzie**, our resident love coach, helps readers open their hearts to relationships they never thought possible



## Keeping the love alive

*Discover how to stop a long-term relationship from stagnating*

If you can get through the first year of marriage, or even the first year of living together, you can get through anything! It's tough trying to keep the fun alive and prevent the drudgery of household chores, work woes and money worries killing off your love for each other.

As a couple, you are two different universes, and it takes time to learn and remember how you both work. You need to show each other a lot of support and kindness.

So, how can you maximise the longevity of your relationship?

Recently, I went to a conference about sex and the brain, and one of the speakers compared couples to desert voles, little creatures that bond with one partner for life.

As the male guards and protects the female, the sexual hormone vasopressin is released into his body, which makes him feel great. In turn, his protective behaviour produces the happiness hormone oxytocin in the female.

If the male stops protecting his

mate, she'll try to find another male, who will protect her and encourage the release of oxytocin. Likewise, if the vasopressin is suppressed in the male, he will lose his devotion to his partner and the bond will break.

What the behaviour of the desert voles illustrates is that when both partners feel nurtured and happy, they are hormonally balanced and in sync with one another, which makes for a stable relationship.

Women generally have more oxytocin than men and receive it through touch, cuddling children, laughing with friends and from sex.

Men, meanwhile, tend to have more vasopressin than women, and it's released after sex, which helps to cement a long-term commitment.

Get the hormonal balance wrong and there could be trouble. For

example, if a male dominates his partner, it will leave her feeling vulnerable and lacking in oxytocin. Or, if a female overly criticises her other half, it will diminish his levels of vasopressin and that protective instinct will vanish. This is when a relationship may falter because neither partner feels safe or loved.

The key to maintaining a loving and committed relationship, or getting it back on track, is to put an end to any destructive behaviour that might be knocking your hormones out of sync.

### How to stay connected

What to avoid in a relationship:

#### DEFENSIVENESS

If your partner says you've done something they're not happy about, don't get defensive or deflect their

comment by accusing them of something. Instead confront the issue by talking about it together.

#### STONEWALLING

This sort of body language – when you look away and cross your arms – is sending out a strong message: 'I won't listen to you.' This will only leave your partner feeling crushed. Instead, take a deep breath and think before you react. Try vocalising how you feel rather than showing your feelings in your body language as they could be misinterpreted.

#### CONTEMPT

This can manifest in name-calling or criticism. If contempt from one partner to another continues for a long period, it can cause illness, so should really be nipped in the bud.

What to show more of in your relationship:

#### KINDNESS

Think of nice ways to treat your partner. Think about what they would like and appreciate – a trip to an art gallery, a home-cooked meal, a night on the sofa with a movie?

#### COMPASSION

Empathise with how your partner may be feeling, even if you don't understand why they feel like that.

#### TIME

Plan dates, meals, shared time together, just the two of you.

#### CONSIDERATION

Think about how you can build up your partner's confidence and help them feel good about themselves. ■

**WANT TO FIND OUT MORE?**

Cate Mackenzie is a love coach and couples counsellor with more than 20 years' experience. For more information about her work, visit [catemackenzie.com](http://catemackenzie.com)

Offer your partner kindness and support

