

vated, the fear-shame whirlwind diminishes all other areas of intimacy and connection so that sex, as a *symbol* of intimacy and connection, seems to be a major factor in the disappointment people feel about their relationships.

There's another reason to stress the importance of sex—it's good for your physical and mental health, as long as it's fully consensual. Pat still has to laugh at this statement. When she began the research for her book *Hot Monogamy*, she secretly hoped to find that mature, highly evolved, intelligent beings didn't want or need sex, that it was only the lower animals, way down the food chain, who made sex a priority. You can probably guess that she hoped that because her own sexual desire was very low. Alas, this is not what she found. She found that, indeed, sex has many advantages to both people involved. Here are just a few.

Twenty Reasons to Have Sex When You Don't Feel Like It

1. Because you said so. Even though you may not have promised to "love, honor, and have sex once a week" when you made a commitment to your relationship, it was understood that sex would be part of the bargain. Imagine how the marriage rates would go down if people said, "I'll marry you, but don't expect sex." If you polled one thousand people on the street and asked them, "Is it reasonable to expect to have sex when you are married?" the overwhelming majority would say yes. If you expect a monogamous commitment from your partner, then it stands to reason that you will be a cooperative sex partner.

2. Sex helps you forget. Oxytocin, which triggers orgasm, has an amnesic effect that lasts up to five hours. So for a period of time you forget that he maxed out your Visa card or she was an hour late getting home from work. Women get an additional benefit. During orgasm the parts of the brain that govern fear, anxiety, and stress are switched off. (Faking orgasm gives no such benefit.)

3. Sex rewires you for pleasure. Every time you share a positive experience with your partner, your brain comes to associate him or her with pleasure. You can transform any relationship simply by increasing the number of enjoyable times you share together.

4. Sex puts the "P" back in partnership. Passion is what separates your relationship with your intimate partner from those with girlfriends and buddies. Yes, you two are best friends and confidants, but without sex you will not have passion.

The following are from a 1997 study in the *British Medical Journal*.

5. Heightened sense of smell. After sex, production of prolactin surges, causing stem cells in the brain to develop new neurons in the brain's smell center (olfactory bulb).

6. Weight loss. Rambunctious sex burns a minimum of two hundred calories, about the same as running fifteen minutes on a treadmill. British researchers determined that the equivalent of six Big Macs can be worked off by having sex three times a week for a year.

7. Reduced depression. Prostaglandin, a hormone found in semen, modulates female hormones. Orgasm releases endorphins, producing a sense of well-being and euphoria.

8. Pain relief. During sex, levels of oxytocin surge to five times their normal level, releasing endorphins that alleviate pain. Sex also prompts production of estrogen, which reduces the pain of PMS.

9. Healthier heart. Women who have more sex have higher levels of estrogen, which protects against heart disease.

10. Cure for the common cold. Once-a-week sex produces 30 percent higher levels of immunoglobulin A, which boosts the immune system.

11. Better bladder control. Sex strengthens the pelvic muscles that control the flow of urine.

12. Peppy prostate. Some urologists believe they see a relationship between infrequency of ejaculation in men and cancer of the prostate. In this case solo sex works just as well, but why miss out on all the other benefits?

13. Shiny hair, glowing skin. For women, extra estrogen from orgasm makes hair shine. Sweat produced during sex cleanses the pores and makes skin glow. Serotonin produces the afterglow of sex.

14. Calming effect. Sex is ten times more effective than Valium, with no side effects.

15. Relief for a stuffy nose. Really. Sex is a natural antihistamine. It can even help combat hay fever and asthma.

16. Firmer tummy and butt. Regular sex can firm your tummy and butt, plus improve posture.

17. Boosts your immune system. Endorphins stimulate immune-system cells that fight disease.

18. Forever young. Sex actually slows the aging process. It lowers cortisol levels in the bloodstream, which reduces stress and slows the aging process.

19. Protection against Alzheimer's and osteoporosis. Women who have more sex have higher levels of estrogen, which protects against Alzheimer's and osteoporosis.

20. Euphoria. Who wouldn't want more? The best way to get a natural high is sex!