

Winter of Our Disconnect

Five ways to warm a chilly relationship.

By Amy Levin-Epstein

Winter can be romantic, full of snuggles by the fire, but in reality, many relationships get frosty this time of year, regardless of whether you live in Philadelphia or Phoenix. The season's shorter days and limited sunlight can really have some of us feeling the ole winter blues, which can take a toll on our interest in intimacy. Plus, we're just getting over the pressures of the holidays and the stresses of being surrounded by the needs of our families. And then there's just plain old cabin fever. Whatever triggers your relationship to get chilly this season, here are five ways to warm things up:

HAVE A GLASS, NOT A BOTTLE

If you do want to cuddle by that fire, swap the hot cocoa for a glass of vino. Researchers found that women who drink a glass or two of wine per day had healthier sex lives than those who abstained. But if you or your partner indulges too liberally, you may drown any romantic intentions. "Too much alcohol and it has the opposite effect on the libido. Orgasms and erections can become difficult," says educational specialist Sharon Gilchrest O'Neill, author of *A Short Guide To A Happy Marriage*.

GO TO THE HEAD OF THE CLASS

Learning together can bring you close in a similar way as raising children. "Being in an environment where you are exposed to new challenges raises arousal levels by

increasing the brain chemical dopamine and can boost your sense of bonding to the person with whom you are sharing the experience," says Dr. Scott Haltzman, author of *The Secrets of Happily Married Women*. Take a cooking class together. Working with your hands and being able to enjoy your creations will provide great stimulation for your senses.

UNPLUG

While technology is a great way to keep in touch with friends, family and work, it can also act as kryptonite for intimacy. "The addictive nature of such use can be an escape, a shutdown on the marriage and an excuse to ignore problems," Gilchrest says. In a recent survey, 38 percent of women admitted that they would give up sex for a year in order to have use of a mobile phone. And Haltzman notes: "Studies show that couples who remove a television set from their bedroom can end up having sex twice as frequently as those who have a TV." So leave *Grey's Anatomy* for living room viewing and play doctor in the bedroom.

PLAY AROUND

Technology can also power up your relationship. Borrow that Wii you bought your kids and add the new Wii Sports



Resort. The latter comes with two Wii Motion Plus sensors, which plug into the bottom of your controller to pick up precise body movements, helpful when challenging your mate to games like a three-point basketball contest, archery and sword fighting. "Research shows that having fun, laughing, working out and competing all increase the level of endorphins," Gilchrest says. "Additionally, there is anecdotal evidence that Wii games promote connection and positive reinforcement of teamwork in couples."

CHANGE MORE THAN YOUR BED SHEETS

Mixing up your bedroom routine is a great way to shake up a lackluster love life, Gilchrest says. Instead of slipping into your usual nightclothes, splurge on something that makes *you* feel sexy, or try sleeping in nothing at all. If you want to start smaller, simply write down your dreams and share them. ☺

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