

INTIMACY, SEX & RELATIONSHIP

Ticking Clock Can Make Sex Stressful Time



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The angle of the morning sun streams through the bedroom window, illuminating Andy and Trish's cool, naked bodies. They used to like morning sex, lying in one another's arms all warm and cozy. But that was before . . .

For more than a year now, ever since they've been trying to get pregnant, sex is just work. The fun is gone. Instead of tenderness, their sexual times are robotic and perfunctory, "doing it" when the thermometer gives them the high sign.

As they cling silently to opposite sides of their king-size bed, both lost in their own thoughts, Trish struggles to hold back the tears: "What's wrong with me, with us. Why can't we do what others do naturally?"

At 37, Trish, a registered nurse, fears she might never experience the joys of childbirth, never feel the flutter of life moving inside of her. Her mother went through menopause early, and she doesn't know how much time she has left on her own biological clock. All she knows is that she's ready, but her body apparently has other ideas.

Her friends, sisters and cousins have babies, and she's tired of going to baby showers for other people. Tired of selecting the paint chips for other people's nursery walls. Tired of watching other women's bellies grow. She and Andy have always wanted a family, a big family. What if they never have even one child?

Andy, a 35-year-old physically fit firefighter, is equally discouraged; he just doesn't show it in the same way as Trish. He feels like a huge failure. For some reason, something has gone wrong. He just can't maintain his erection.

Before they got serious about making a baby, his erections worked like a charm. He can't figure it out. He's tried everything, even Viagra. But when it's time for the event, it goes flat. He has even tried sneaking up on his morning erection during those red-letter days, but his firmness developed the annoying habit of evaporating, poof.

To top it all off, Trish is taking responsibility for Andy's erectile dysfunction. She has become depressed, has put on weight and is convinced it's all because he finds her sexually undesirable.

Instead of pulling together, they are arguing more and making love less. They're even thinking about splitting up!

Infertility is a complex problem with multiple etiologies affecting more than 7 million Americans.

When couples have trouble conceiving — for whatever the reasons — it is important to understand that deciding to be a mom or dad (or making your parents "grandparents") may define what you believe to be your life's purpose. Everything else takes second place or lower.

To complicate things further, Trish and Andy's friends and family are unaware of the couple's struggles, teasing them with comments like, "When are you guys going to get busy in the bedroom?"

The stress of infertility and sexual dysfunction affects men as well as women. Although we hear about the pain and intrusiveness of a variety of infertility treatments that women undergo, men are also embarrassed, saddened and distraught. They worry about performing on demand or not having "good enough swimmers" to get the job done.

Not all infertility problems involve sexual dysfunction, but many do. Disorders of desire, arousal or response are especially common when couples experience the pressure to perform.

Although solutions are individual, there is one thing all couples must do. When you worry your bodies are failing you, move closer to those you love. Don't discharge your hurts against them or against yourselves.

When I see couples that are so desperate to have a child that they have forgotten the meaning of their original union, I sometimes worry they may succeed in impregnation but fail at intimacy.

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