

TOO BUSY FOR INTIMACY

One of the most common excuses I hear is, "We're too busy to make love." In the rosy afterglow of good sex, who hasn't thought, "That was great ... we should really do this more often!" But as you drift off to sleep, you know full well that you'll probably let life's tedium pre-empt your opportunities for tenderness.

Sadly, I think couples actually believe what they



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tell me — that they are victims of overcommitted lifestyles that have jettisoned them into isolation from one another. They come to my office armed with detailed descriptions of over-burdened schedules that justify their intimacy dry spells.

"We have young kids, we travel a lot on business, we have three dogs, tons of yard work ..." The lists are endless. And what if I had a magic wand and could give them one more day each week — free — no strings attached? How do you think they'd spend this gift? Do you think they'd rush home and make love?

I doubt it. They'd probably fill their time with more of the same — a trip to the mall, answering e-mails, or playing 18 holes of golf.

The White Rabbit's words from "Alice in Wonderland" ring true for many of us — "I'm late, I'm late, for a very important date! No time to say hello, goodbye, I'm late, I'm late, I'm late!" Pressured, stressed, rushing to pick up the kids or meet some deadline, we pile more and more on our precariously balanced plates. Despite our lip-service to the contrary, what often slips off the edge is what we claim to value most — sharing special moments with the person we love.

So why do we fill our lives with so much clutter and noise? Why don't we steal some moments of tenderness for ourselves? Perhaps it's not a

shortage of time that prevents us from being close; but the difficulties inherent in being intimate. I'm not suggesting that we're not legitimately filled to the brim with responsibilities, just that we each make choices about how to spend our most precious resource — time.

When it comes to sex, it's easy to feel paralyzed by fears of failure and not getting it right. We worry about expressing our vulnerability or may feel blocked by anxiety. It all seems too onerous — too burdensome — too much work.

Our expectations for sexual perfection have become our worst enemy, feeding our procrastination and inertia. Patterns are difficult to change. When I suggested that one couple, who had erectile problems, kick back and spend some time casually touching, they replied, "If we can't go the distance, why prime the pump?"

For sex to be considered good-enough, it has to meet so many prerequisites. It can feel unattainable. Like some Magnum Opus or a five course banquet, it's just too rich and complicated. Is it any wonder that couples choose to avoid the pressure and become too busy for sex entirely?

Instead of openly acknowledging the complex challenges of intimacy or creative lovemaking, it's easier to blame our unavoidably busy schedules. It reminds me of a would-be novelist I once knew. He dreamed of being a published author but never wrote a line. Once, at a party, I overheard him say, "I have a book in me. I only need to sequester myself away for a year in a little cabin by a lake. I

know I could write it."

Maybe he would, and maybe he wouldn't. Maybe he'd just take up fly-fishing or collect butterflies. Who knows? Writers write one word at a time; and lovers love one touch at a time. If it has to be all or nothing, don't be surprised if it's the latter.

If your sexual problems could be "cured" by following the common-sense advice of most self-help guides, don't you think people would just do it? How many times have you heard: schedule a date night, light candles, or share a glass of wine in front of the fireplace? These common-sense suggestions seem reasonable enough. Unfortunately, scheduling love-making may not thrill the partner who longs for spontaneity, and lighting candles might worry the obsessive who's concerned the curtains could go up in flames (or the red wine will spill on the white family-room rug).

There isn't a one-size-fits-all solution for good loving, nor should there be. Part of the deal is learning how to manage the uncertainty of the moment. There is no formula. Not everyone feels sexy in Victoria's Secret lingerie. You may just be in a T-shirt kind of mood. Before you can jumpstart your passion and dare to erase some of the appointments in your PDA, you have to stop believing the excuses that have kept you apart.

All relationships ebb and flow as priorities surface. The duties of motherhood and fatherhood may understandably make you feel as though you have nothing left to give — not even to yourselves.

If you find yourself going many weeks or months without emotional and physical intimacy, however, you may not realize you've slipped into a starvation mode — a kind of intimacy anorexia that devitalizes you and robs you of your emotional strength and well-being.

As you wait for the right moment to share intimately, life passes ever and ever more swiftly. When patients complain that they have no time, I tell them to steal some moments from their own schedules. Grab time, make time, take time, and spend time — together. Perhaps you could playfully join your partner in the shower or hug as you pass in the hallway, or maybe you could stop to rub your lover's shoulders as he or she labors at the computer.

Find small scraps of time, like a patchwork quilt, and weave them into the lasting fabric of your relationship. Vacations are great — but we can't depend upon the luxury of endless hammock-filled days to express our love.

So stop believing your own excuses. None of us is too busy to touch. If your lover is next to you right now, steal a moment — just one moment. The clock is ticking. When you protest that only time stands in the way of you and your sexual intimacy, think again. It's not time, but how we choose to spend it, that makes all the difference.

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To Ask A Question ...

Our intimate relationships and sexual health are intensely personal concerns that many people find difficult to discuss. Please think of this as a safe place to have those concerns addressed.

Write to me in confidence at: AskDrScantling@aol.com.

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