

You make me sick, honey

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Does your husband or wife make you sick?

Does she/he make you fat? Are you totally out of shape or tired out because of your spouse?

Well, you're not alone. Experts agree your partner's harmful habits may be jeopardizing not only their health, but yours, too!

"Your partner can absolutely make you fat and sick and sabotage all your efforts to be healthy," says relationship expert Dr. Bonnie Eaker Weil.



"We are all very impacted and influenced by our partner — in bad ways, as well as good. They can definitely encourage and discourage."

Eaker Weil says you're more at risk if you're exposed to negative health and behavioural characteristics day-in and day-out.

"It's just easier to be lazy, eat lousy and take the easy way out."

According to a poll in the March issue of Chatelaine magazine, the majority blame partners for their bad health habits: Thirty-seven per cent share unhealthy habits with their partner; and 37% get lazy together sometimes. Only a dismal 17% motivate each other, while a paltry 9% report both being healthy.

Seems if you can't beat 'em, join 'em!

A University of Michigan study substantiates strong spousal influence — "significant similarities" — between spouses' drinking, smoking and exercise habits, as well as projected health risks, were documented in the 10-year-old study.

According to Dr. Sender Deutsch, "we invariably follow the partner with bad habits as it is the path of lesser resistance. Let's face it, staying in bed, eating fast food and not working out are all very easy. It's far more difficult to counter those lazy

choices of convenience.

“It’s tough enough to motivate yourself, let alone motivate someone else who’s clearly uninterested in changing their ways,” says Deutsch, head of SHAPE Health and Wellness Centre in Toronto.

Marriage and family therapist **Marilyn Belleghem** adds that couples gain intimacy in shared time and activities — good and bad: “Often one partner will move toward the interests and tastes of the other in order to avoid conflict and find common ground.”

ARE YOUR PARTNER'S HABITS HURTING YOU? CHECK IT OUT:

- **UNHEALTHY DIET:** Prepare for a food fight, say the experts. It’s difficult to follow a healthy diet if your spouse eats poorly and brings fattening food into the house. “I have cases where a spouse purposely wants his wife to be fat so no one looks at her — so they bring her candy home every day,” says relationship expert Dr. Bonnie Eaker Weil.

Support is crucial to good eating and successful weight loss, says Toronto weight loss coach Harvey Brooker.

“Bringing the wrong food into the home will eventually break down anyone’s determination ... the whole family has to be on-side if this is to work.”

- **EXERCISE:** A spouse’s negative attitude or lack of interest towards exercise is likely to affect their partner, resulting in a workout dropout.

According to research, among married people who joined an exercise program, 92% of those who joined as couples were still exercising after one year; more than half of those who joined without their spouses dropped out.

The sedentary spouse may feel threatened by a slim, trim mate, or may resent the time given to another activity, adds Eaker Weil. “Exercising efforts may be undermined — beware the ‘come and cuddle with me’ pleas on your way out to an early morning workout. It’s an underhanded way to keep you unhealthy and unhappy like he is.”

A possible solution: “Find something you can both enjoy like dancing, walking, cycling, swimming rather than just gym workouts that can be boring to many,” says therapist **Marilyn Belleghem**.

- **HEAVY DRINKING:** Men tend to drink more heavily than women and Dr. Ken Leonard says it’s the husband who has more influence on whether the couple engages in heavy drinking. “Heavy drinking (consuming six or more drinks in one sitting once or more a week) has an impact on marital conflict,” says Leonard, whose study of newlywed couples linked heavy drinking with domestic violence.

Eaker Weil says heavy drinking is not only unhealthy physically but also destructive to marriage and family.

“Addiction takes precedence over a relationship – it’s never a rational thing.”

- **RESTLESS NIGHTS:** Snoring can definitely affect sleep quality — for both the snorer and the spouse, say experts.

Belleghem says snoring is a common complaint that can lead to separate sleeping arrangements. “Ear plugs, waking the person snoring and altering sleep positions with pillows, beds that tilt, etc. are all possible remedies.

Just because a couple sleeps separately, their sexual relationship does not have to suffer.”

- **SMOKING:** If you’re trying to quit and he isn’t, good luck. Success rate will be minimal and resistance maximal, say the experts, even though it’s deadly behaviour — smoking causes about 30% of all cancer deaths, according to the Canadian Cancer Society.

Dr. Leonard’s research indicates women are more likely to match their husband’s behaviour when it comes to smoking.