

Does 'I do' = 'I gain'?

For many couples, marriage can be fattening

By CATHY STAPELLS
Toronto Sun

Packed on a few extra pounds since your wedding day? You're not alone.

After all, you've bagged a mate, now you can get comfortable and let yourself go.

Derek, 27, has gone from 160 to 200 pounds since getting married. "No, I don't feel less attractive," he says. "But I'm married, so I don't really care now."

Nutrition, health and marriage experts say there's more to it than that: Aging, genetics, childbirth, lack of exercise, job loss and financial worries, as well as a lack of time because of our hectic lifestyles, contribute to our expanding waistlines.

Sam, 39, who has been married for 15 years and has two children, says both he and his wife have put on about 50 pounds. The turning point came when they started a family.

"Parenthood places a huge burden on your personal freedom and particularly on any lifestyle that would have previously allowed any shared physical activity," he says.

'UNREAL FROTH'

In the eight years Lori and her common-law husband have been together, he's gone from 160 to almost 300 pounds.

"He says it's my fault because I've treated him too well. I think men just get lazy and women get busy," she says.

When people are dating there's intense social pressure to look nice to secure a mate, so we primp a lot and diet, diet, diet.

For many, it's more performance than reality.

"The magical time of courting, engagement and marriage is unreal froth. If you're in it for the looks, you'll be disappointed," says Toronto marriage therapist Judith Golden.



Having their cake and eating it can lead to weight gain. -- Michael Peake, SUN

Fran Berkoff, a nutritionist and Sun columnist, agrees. "On your wedding day, you're conscious of how you look and often diet beforehand to be slim," she says. "After, you often sink back to the habits you had before."

Yet, not all people "let themselves go" after marriage.

"If a person knows themselves well and has an intrinsic health regime, they'll stick with it," says Marilyn Belleghem, a registered marriage and family therapist in Oakville.

She says there are also those people who are very image-conscious. "For example, a wife who will get up ahead of her husband to put her makeup on so he doesn't see her without it. She feels the need to be perfect."

Realistic or not, appearance counts, because looks are what attract people first.

"Most singles would agree a healthy physique is necessary to attract a potential partner," says Sam. "Once you're married, physical appearances no longer seem important. Being overweight seems to be an acceptable part of being married."

Putting on a few pounds is not the end of the world.

Normal body changes occur as people age. They lose muscle mass and their shape changes, particularly for women after childbirth. Their weight may be the same, but their hips have spread so they can't get into the jeans they once wore.

"These are acceptable adult changes. And it's different from the woman who thinks now she's caught her man she can stop doing her hair and go around the house in baggy sweats," says Belleghem.

When it comes to sex, weight gain can act like a cold shower for those people no longer attracted to their spouses.

"When you're married, it's your commitment to each other that should matter, and so you overcome a weight change. However, we do care what our partner looks like, because in some ways we see them as a reflection of ourselves, especially in our culture, which isn't forgiving of obesity," says Denver psychologist Andrea Van Steenhouse.

Yet, Golden makes the point that heavy people can have good sex. "If one spouse is turned off, perhaps they're really dissatisfied with other issues in the marriage."

It is difficult to talk with a spouse about weight gain.

'A HEALTH ISSUE'

"Talk about it as a health issue. For example, weight is an issue for those with sleep apnea," says

Change your ways to lose weight

Experts offer these tips for keeping weight off:

Stop cleaning up the kids' plates by eating what's left over. Instead, portion their plates accordingly.

Don't skip meals, then play catch up -- you'll eat more.

As a couple, plan low-fat meals. When snacking over your favourite late-night movie, choose popcorn instead of chips.

Keep exercising. Don't stop playing hockey with your buddies or tennis with your girlfriends. Go for a walk after dinner, it's a perfect way to spend time together.

Van Steenhouse. "A weight problem is either an eating or exercise issue. Express concern about how much or what your spouse is consuming. Encourage exercise in a loving way by suggesting you both go for a walk."

When all is said and done, most of us accept our spreading hips and bellies as "just more to love."

Shell, who says he's "married with girth," says he's more contented since his marriage to wife Patty. "I use the old 'fat and happy' adage, which kind of fits since I have found the woman I will be with forever, and she accepts me for what and who I am."