

Sex After Kids

You might be a great parent but a lousy lover...

We can grow to be both...

by Ted Cunningham and Gary Smalley

Ted Cunningham: Corynn's birth was one of the single most important days of our marriage and lives. She was born around 8:30 in the morning on August 4, 2003. My wife was a trooper. I knew she was a strong woman, but her stock shot way up in my book after watching her battle through labor for nine hours. There were no complications, and I was giving Corynn her first bath by nine-thirty.

During bath time Amy was tended to by the nursing staff and was moved from the birthing room to a regular room down the hall. The nurses on that first shift were amazing. Sweet and kind, they were over-the-top gracious in their care for Mommy, baby, and even Daddy.

The regular tests were performed on Corynn throughout the day, but other than that, she spent most of the day in the room with us greeting family and friends. As nighttime came around, we were greeted by the second shift of nurses. Again, they were sweet and over-the-top friendly. But there was one nurse I will never forget.

She was passionate about nursing and had been in the field for at least three decades. Eligible for retirement, she was the type to keep working another three decades. She was strong, to the point, and more blunt than anyone else I had ever met in the medical field. She had much to say to Amy and only one line to say to me.

To Amy she spoke like a coach calling plays, "Now, honey, you need to get some good rest tonight and let us take care of the baby. She'll be fine. You did great today, and you're going to recover, no problem. I'll check in on you throughout the night. You just press this button if you need anything. And I mean anything."

Then she turned to me and delivered one of the most shocking statements I have ever received: "And for you, there will be no sex going on in this room tonight."

What? No words came out of my mouth, but she could tell from my wide-eyed, jaw-

dropped expression that I was floored.

So she continued, "Son, I have walked in on more guys making advances on their wives after childbirth, getting all fresh and wanting some. I break it up immediately."

I would not believe such a thing if I read it in a book, but this nurse was quite convincing. I had spent much of the day watching Amy struggle in pain from the bed to the sink and back to the bed and could not imagine making an advance. Also, I knew the rule was a six-week sexual Sabbath. The doctor hadn't instructed me yet, but I knew it was coming.

"Ma'am, I can promise you that it was not even in my mind," I assured her.

"Good," she said, "but I don't take anything for granted, and I give that warning to every young husband."

How sick does a person have to be to do something like that? Just her bringing it up to me made me feel dirty.

The next night the same nurse wheeled in a cart with a television and VCR and one instruction: "We need you to watch this shaken-baby-syndrome video before you leave the hospital tomorrow."

Not thinking, I said, "Oh, that won't be a problem; we don't need to watch it." Wrong thing to say.

"It is guys just like you who shake babies," she snapped at me.

Not only was I a pervert in her book, but I was also an abusive father. Seven years later, her words still haunt me at night.

We did wait the six weeks, but even after that sabbatical, sex was a real struggle. New parents face many challenges and distractions, and keeping the romance alive takes work. It may not be as spontaneous as it was before kids, but it can be just as enjoyable. Actually, we have found that sex after kids is even better.

Here are some very practical steps you can take to have hot, passionate sex after the kids come along.

First, be okay with appointment sex. It is not all that sexy. Some find it demeaning. Others find it necessary. Since sexual interest builds, it sometimes can be the first step toward renewed passion. You can probably share stories of times when you weren't in the mood, but after you got started, you got in the mood. There have been plenty of days in our marriage when neither Amy nor I were in the mood. Yes, even as a guy I have those days when sex feels like too much work. Long hours at work, sick kids, all-day baseball tournaments with your kids in ninety-degree heat, and even camping can hinder the lovin' feelin'. It is on those nights that Amy and I look at each other while brushing our teeth

and say, "You know, it has been a long week." It surprises both of us how quickly we get in the mood after we get started. Setting times and places in advance is not a bad thing. Just be cautious to not allow appointment sex to become routine.

Second, remove distractions. Making love next to a baby monitor is sort of like making love next to a car alarm ready to go off. It puts you a smidge on edge. Guys can have distracted sex. We can work through it. While most women need to focus on the act to reach orgasm, a husband usually needs to focus on something else to keep from orgasm. Amazing how that works.

Here are just a few ways to remove distractions before sex:

1. Brush off crumbs in bed left there by children during their afternoon snack.
2. Throw away dirty diapers and anything related to the changing of a baby.
3. Move the dinner dishes from the sink to the dishwasher.
4. Stuff clutter from dresser tops into drawers.
5. Make the bed even if it has been unmade all day. Fresh is good.
6. Make sure the door is locked. Security is important.
7. Turn on a white-noise machine or radio.
8. Make sure small children have gone potty, had a good meal, and have gotten a sip of water.

Ted: That last one is key. You need to know that the kids are sleeping well. As a young husband and father, I had no idea how much of a distraction a sleeping child was for my wife. Sex after feedings instead of right before them made for better sex. The thought of Corynn waking up and needing something was always in the back of Amy's mind.

Third, conserve energy for sex. It might sound counterintuitive, but one of the best ways to make sure you have energy is to exercise regularly. The only thing that gets me through the winter and my seasonal affective disorder is exercise. We can easily mistake all of the running around with the kids as exercise. It is not. Busyness and exercise are mutually exclusive. Even with your full calendar, be sure to schedule in time to be healthy and active and to eat right.

Ted: My friend Mark Connelly is a fitness fanatic. When we launched a new ministry for couples, he insisted that one of the main messages focus on getting fit as a couple. I resisted at first. There was a lot of back-and-forth between us, but ultimately we added it to our messages. He pointed to 1 Corinthians 7:4 as his main argument for couples being healthy together: "The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband." Amen on that one, right? The verse continues, "In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife."

Husbands, we are supposed to care about ourselves and our responsibilities, and wives should care about themselves and their responsibilities. My responsibility as Amy's husband is to offer my best to her—heart, soul, mind, and strength. Bringing my best to her physically does make a difference in our marriage.

The American Heart Association estimates that there are a quarter million deaths per year in the United States that are directly attributed to lack of regular exercise. That is 12

percent of the total number of deaths. Each year 250,000 people die because of laziness.

If I don't care for myself physically and I die prematurely and my wife becomes a widow prematurely, then she has to suffer because I didn't bring my best physically to the marriage. That isn't what I want for her. I want her to have my best for as long as God keeps me here. I want to extend the number of days of our marriage as long as I possibly can.

Not only does physical health have the obvious effect of allowing us to be with our loved ones, but it also impacts our whole-being interconnectedness—bodies, emotions, energy ... everything. Physical vitality affects our entire marriage.

A study at the Mayo Clinic argues for the benefits of regular exercise: "Exercise improves your mood Physical activity stimulates brain chemicals that may leave you feeling happier and more relaxed ... and even help prevent depression A good night's sleep improves concentration, productivity and mood Regular physical activity can help you fall asleep faster and deepen your sleep." Regular exercise and good sleep and eating right go a long way toward making you a nicer person to be around.

Another benefit is that exercise brings more energy to your marriage. The Mayo Clinic report also says that exercise boosts your energy level. Physical activity delivers oxygen and nutrients to your tissues, which helps your entire cardiovascular system. When your heart and lungs work more efficiently, you have more energy to do the things you enjoy. In other words, when you are exercising and you're feeling better and your body is healthier, it doesn't have to work so hard, leaving you more energy to spare.

The Mayo Clinic report says exercise affects your sex life. Regular physical activity often leads to enhanced arousal for women and reduces the risk of erectile dysfunction in men. When you take care of yourself physically, you have more confidence in the bedroom. You don't feel like hiding with the lights out. Because of the interconnectedness of our bodies, souls, and emotions, physical health adds to the joy God wants you to have in the bedroom.

Taking care of ourselves is nothing to kid around about. It really is important to bring our best to our spouses in all of who God made us to be.

Amy and I exercise together as a couple a minimum of three times a week. I love running alongside her on the treadmill. We have noticed a big shift in our energy levels, especially during the dark, cold days of winter. It has given us more energy for our work, kids, and each other.

In Song of Solomon 4, this young couple enjoyed great sex together. Then, according to one interpretation, no sooner did they get home from the honeymoon, they had a fight over sex. In Song of Solomon 5:2, the young bride says, "I slept but my heart [Solomon] was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: 'Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one.'"

Solomon initiates sex with his young bride. His bride continues to respond in verse 3: "I have taken off my robe—must I put it on again? I have washed my feet—must I soil them again?" My paraphrase: "I'm not in the mood." We all have times when we are not in the mood. And that is okay. We do not need to condemn each other when that happens.

When your lover is not in the mood, respond as Solomon did. Verses 4-5 say, "My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to pound for him. I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh." Solomon reached through the door and offered liquid myrrh, which is a sign of sweetness. He did not judge, condemn, or taunt her. He walked away peacefully.

His response caused his bride to respond. His response aroused his wife. Verse 6 says, "I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer."

Maybe you often are not in the mood and you constantly hear, "You always use the 'I'm tired' excuse" or "We haven't had any in weeks." Sex is a key part of marriage. So remember your commitment: You no longer own your body. Husbands and wives are to honor and adore each other.

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