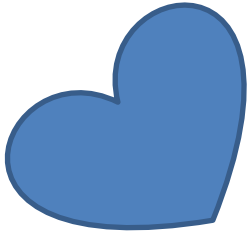


Love Connection



Get connected. Stay Connected



closecompanions.org

Table of Contents

01	About Close Companions	Page 3
02	One Shot at Love	Page 4
03	Rekindle Your Relationship with Mindfulness	Page 5-6
04	True Intimacy: Know and Be Known	Page 7
05	What's it to You?	Page 8
06	On Valentine's Day	Page 9
07	Ask-a-Coach	Page 10
08	Want to Keep Love Alive? Here's How!	Page 11-13
09	Learn More	Page 14

About Close Companions



Close Companions is a program of Better Marriages, founded by David and Vera Mace in 1973.

At the core of our method is our Companionship Model: the idea that you and your partner are equals. You are a team and you both carry equal weight in your relationship, including maintaining it and growing it.

We have developed a series of self-paced online courses in the [Online Relationship Academy](#) proven to help you and your partner build the skills you need to navigate the challenges life brings - so that you grow stronger together, rather than further apart. Anytime, anywhere: our online courses are here for you to start making your good relationship great!

Our instructors and advisors have gone through extensive training in leadership, psychology of interpersonal relationships, group process, and communication. They hold various certifications from widely known and respected organizations such as: [Better Marriages](#), [Prepare-Enrich](#), and [Couple Communication](#).

What Couples Say

“What we’ve learned ranges from simple reminders to profound insights that we could explore together and benefit from for the long haul.” - J&H

“We would absolutely not be together today had we not participated in programs and followed the principles of Close Companions. They have encouraged us, inspired us, and educated us about what a relationship could be. We give them credit for helping us figure out how to not just stay together but to thrive as a couple. And now, thanks to the Online Relationship Academy, we can do it 24/7!” - M&M

“Better Marriages has fed the soul of our marriage! The Close Companions Online Relationship Academy has several courses that go right to the heart of our relationship and help us communicate in positive, constructive ways. We will be sharing this resource with all of our friends!” -K&N



One Shot at Love

by [Dr. Jackie Black](#)



Dr. Jackie Black

Marriage Educator and Board Certified Coach

Remember,
Only YOU can make it happen!



drjackieblack.com

What if you have one shot at creating the best relationship ever...

The fact of the matter is that everyone would be much better off if we actually believed that we only had one shot to build the relationship of our dreams.

Too many smart, articulate and successful adults around the world go into relationships without deliberate intention, and with the belief that if it doesn't work they can break up or get divorced.

That one concept is poison to the entire relationship-building process!

- Decide that divorce is NOT an option.
- Figure out who you are in the deepest recesses of your being.
- Stop acting from fear.
- Stop settling for anything in your relationship just being good enough!

Think of the relationship itself this way: When you and your partner join the many facets of your lives together, you create a third energy, the relationship. The relationship lives and breathes as its own entity; an entity that you are entrusted to guard and protect, nurture and care for.

Making and keeping agreements and com-commitments is one of the ways couples make that happen. It is vital that partners know in the deepest part of their being that they can count on the promises and assurances offered by their beloved.

In a long-term, primary, monogamous love relationship make agreements and commitments to each other AND to the relationship. Fanning the flames of romance and intimacy is another way couples keep their relationship strong. And that requires that each of you take responsibility for creating romance and intimacy in your relationship.

Whatever you believe is true, is! Be deliberate. Be intentional. Believe you can have what you want!

Rekindle Your Relationship with Mindfulness

by [Dr. Linda Miles](#)

Do you recall the beginning of your relationship, when you first fell in love? What is it that made those butterflies in your stomach fade away? What happened along the way that made you lose those moments of staring into each other's eyes and not getting enough? Try to remember those wonderful moments and describe your behavior. Recall your partner's behavior at that time. Is it still the same?

Too often in a long-term relationship partners stop the very behaviors that connected them with one another and not because they stop loving each other but because they begin to take the other one for granted. Sensual and gratifying behaviors are lost, such as looking deeply into one another's eyes, Mouth to mouth kisses, sexual innuendo, offering your partner focused attention, active listening, random compliments, gifts, etc.

What is it that you have stopped doing? What has your partner stopped doing? What behaviors would you like to rekindle in your relationship? How can Mindfulness help you rekindle your relationship? Mindfulness is a practice of awareness in the present moment. Dr. John Gottman, relationship expert and researcher, describes successful long-term unions as a "string of pearls" made up of mindful moments of connection and appreciation. The happiest and healthiest couples do not necessarily spend a lot of time in conversation but they have a myriad of ways of mindfully connecting with one another in the present moment.

Walton and Kathryn were a couple who maintained a mindful connection for 60 years despite financial hardship, two jobs, and four children. Their laughter was their prosperity during hard times. Their joy and pleasure in one another was the wealth in poverty. Their love was the antidote to sorrow. Their daughter, Jan, shared that she thought all parents went to sleep laughing and sharing affection at night because her bedroom shared a common wall with her parents'. Joy and laughter are forms of mindful connection to one another in the present moment.

When Walton was dying, he told a group of us who stopped by the story of how he and Kathryn had a hurried wedding so he could go off to the Second World War and that she was still his sweetheart after 60 years. She sat beside him and beamed. Walton and Kathryn are an inspirational couple who maintained a mindful connection over time. We have all seen such couples but what lessons can we apply to our relationships?

In order to have a relationship as successful as theirs, mindful training is a plus. Mindful training includes the practice of focusing on the breath to calm down and experience the present moment, and deliberately sending compassion to self and others.

In order to maintain a healthy relationship, partners should make a habit to manifest affection towards one another. Physical affection boosts testosterone in a woman and oxytocin in a man and increases his bonding with her. Just mindfully thinking about your partner with feelings of loving-kindness can boost the pleasure chemical dopamine and [lower stress hormones](#) adrenalin and cortisol. You get a kind of pleasurable chemical shower.



Dr. Linda Miles

PSYCHOTHERAPIST
RELATIONSHIP
SPECIALIST
AUTHOR & SPEAKER



"If you change your story...you can change your brain."

Rekindle Your Relationship with Mindfulness Page 2

One of the most effective acts is mindfully kissing on the mouth. That is because lips are incredibly sensitive. "Of the 12 or 13 cranial nerves that affect cerebral functions, five are at work when we kiss". (Scientific American). In addition, kissing on the mouth allows for an exchange of saliva that can help boost the immune system of both partners. Human beings are wired for connection so practice mindfully bringing yourself into the present moment to enjoy all the sensations generated an intimate kiss.

In order to maintain a healthy relationship, partners should make a habit to share affection daily. Physical affection boosts testosterone in a woman and oxytocin in a man and increases his bonding with her. Sex therapist, David Schnarch, recommends a type of mindful intimate connection called "eyes open" sex so couples maintain prescient awareness of one another during the sexual experience.

PRACTICES

Physical affection and sex offer a myriad of opportunities to practice mindfulness with your partner. As you kiss on the lips, notice how your body feels as you attend to the sensations of the present moment. Remember what behaviors you had when you first fell in love and mindfully repeat those behaviors. Mindfully look into your partner's eyes with compassion for his/her struggles.

Find ways to connect mindfully with your partner in the present moment through laughter, mutual memories, walks, and shared affection. This becomes a positive bank account of emotions so, when times are hard, you have these connections.

Initiate sexual contact and use all your senses to experience the moment. Look into your partner's eyes, play special music, savor the touch of skin, smell scented candles or massage oil. Always return to the sensations of the present moment.

It is possible to mindfully cultivate a compassionate awareness of your partner by following these steps: Sit quietly for five minutes at a time and pay attention to your breathing. Since mindfulness is a practice, it is better to do this for longer. However, short segments can also be helpful.

Feel the breath moving into your heart with kindness and care and repeat: "May I be free of suffering. May I be at peace". Allow yourself to be healed. Continue repeating "May I be healed. May I be free of suffering" with each breath.

Imagine loving kindness with each breath. Continue breathing as you focus on your loving-kindness and relating to yourself with tenderness while sending well-being into your mind and body. Repeat for a number of breaths: "May I find my greatest joy. May I heal into my true nature".

Now bring your mind to your partner and imagine that you can send them warmth and kindness. With each breath think, "May you be free from suffering. May you be at peace.". Continue the breathing of connection and this wish for their happiness and wholeness, repeating: "May you be free from suffering. May you know your deepest joy, your greatest peace.". Continue and picture your partner's presence with a wish for their healing and deepest joy.

To rekindle your relationship, mindfully pay attention and treat your partner as you treated him/her in the beginning. Don't take him/her for granted and most important: enjoy moments spent together, living it in the present. This is what mindfulness is about!

True Intimacy: Know and be Known

By Greg and Priscilla Hunt

It's never too early - or late - to celebrate Valentine's Day! Here's an idea – celebrate Valentine's Day *every day*. We're not just talking about the stars-in-your-eyes romance that the media promotes. That's important in even the longest of marriages, but there's more. The ultimate romance is the romance that leads to true intimacy – knowing and being known at the core of who we are. All of us were created with a longing for this.

To make this Valentine's Day the best ever, try this: determine to do whatever it takes to improve your relationship with your partner. Research shows that if couples will channel their energy and creativity towards strengthening their relationship, our families will be healthier, our children will be happier, and we as individuals will increase our emotional, mental, spiritual and physical well-being.

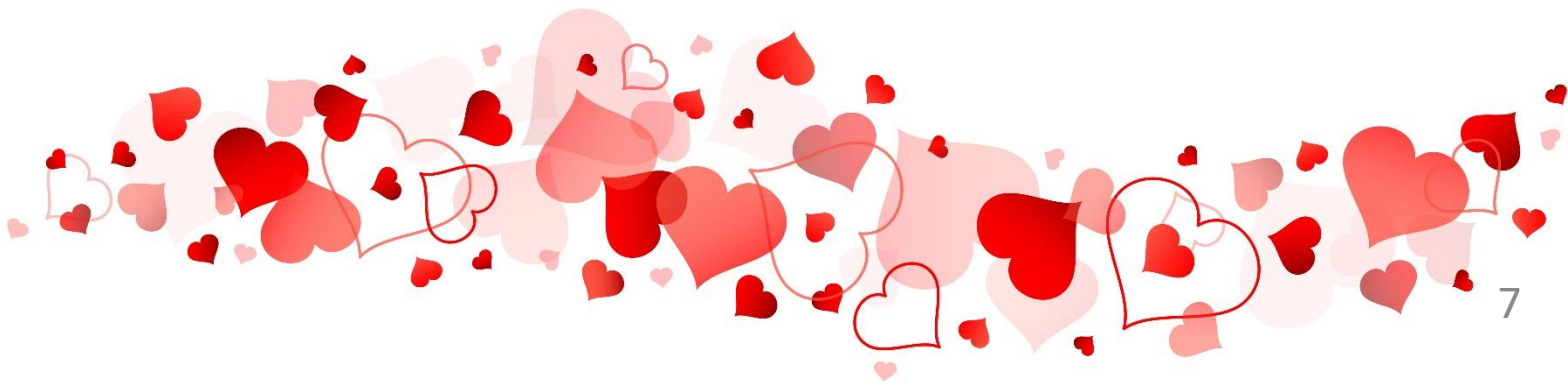
Actions

- Adopt a pro-active, growth-focused attitude about your relationship.
- Spend more time together as a couple.
- Schedule regular date nights and getaways with your partner. Write it on the calendar and protect it!
- Set aside time each day to talk together about the important things of your day and your life. Go deeper than “small talk” and “shop talk”.
- Work on your problems and conflicts – don't let them go unresolved or sweep them under the rug.
- Get help if you need it. Seek out a counselor, therapist or minister.
- Attend a relationship class, join a couple growth group or read a book together about relationships. Yes, relationships take work – but it's work that pays off! This can be the best Valentine's Day you've ever experienced!

Talk About It

With your partner, take turns sharing your answers to these questions. Together, create an action plan with realistic goals for the next 3-6 months.

- 1.What am I personally willing to do (what specific actions)
- 2.Where might we find time to have daily sharing time (10-15 minutes)
- 3.When might we schedule a date night or getaway (write it on the calendar)
- 4.Are there any unresolved conflicts we need to talk about (choosing a time in advance to talk about it can help set the stage for a calm, non-emotional conversation)



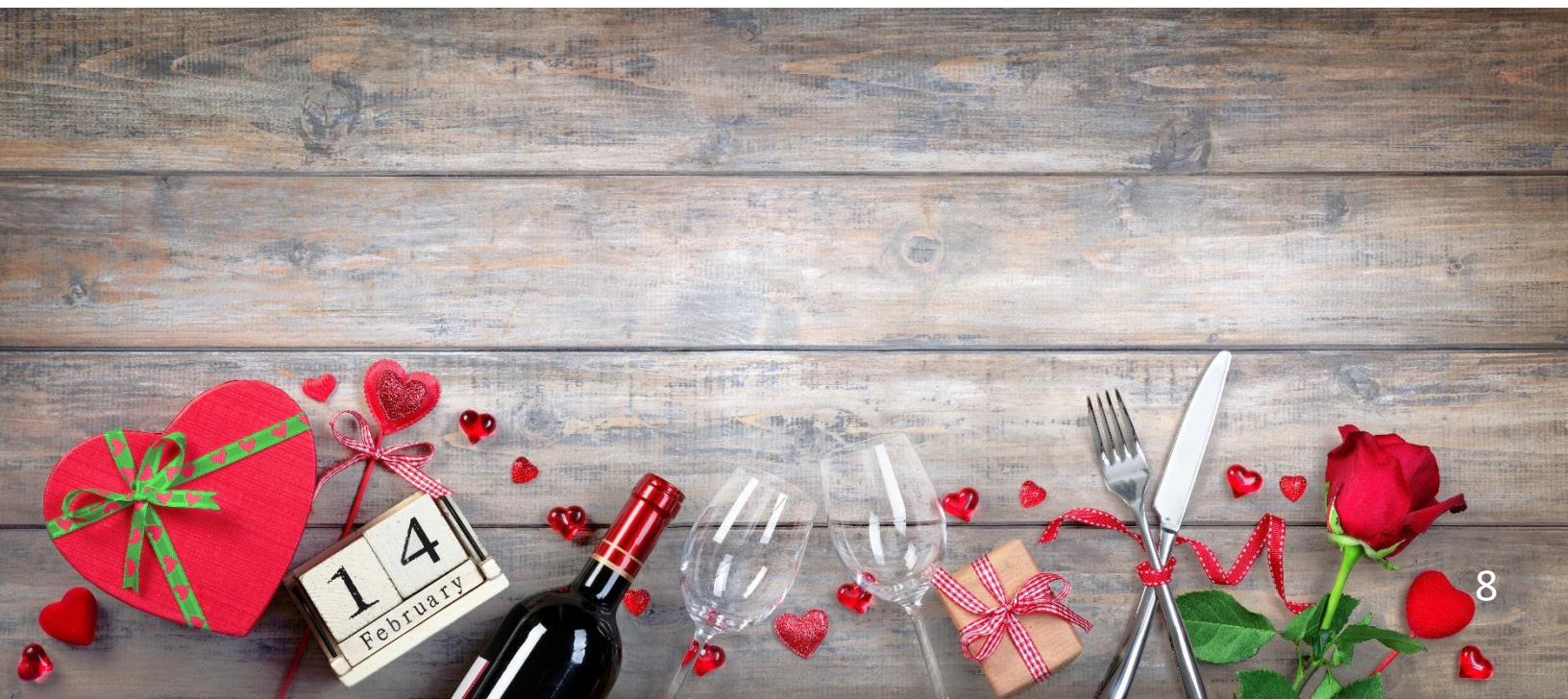


What's it to You?

Valentine's Day isn't a one-size-fits-all. What's romantic to you might be very different from what's romantic to your partner.

Why not ask your partner what is their perfect Valentine's Day? Their answer might surprise you. Double dating (or Zooming) might sound like heaven to one and hell to another. One might want chocolates and flowers; one might prefer to workout together.

Movies and Hallmark present one face of Valentine's Day and we, somehow, have come to believe that's the norm. Remember, what's romantic to one might be different for someone else. So. . . just ask!



On Valentine's Day

by Val McKinley

On Valentine's Day two years ago, my husband surprised me by taking me to the Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) here in Scottsdale, AZ. Romancing Arizona was the theme of the evening and it was a treat from start to finish. Towards the end of the evening, as we sat and enjoyed watching couples dancing to the wonderful band that was playing, I was struck by all of the sizes and shapes of love! The dance floor was a study in happiness and affection.

Those couples in motion seemed to embody the qualities of what happy long-term couples do. In unions that thrive, couples are positive towards one another, are affectionate, and have sex.

Since then, I have been drawn to several articles depicting happy couples. The same trend I observed at the MIM was also reflected in famous couples as well! I'd like to share a few quick quotes that have grabbed my attention.

(The late British prime minister) Margaret Thatcher: ("I was a better politician because of Denis.") "If you've got security and certainty behind you, if you come home to total loyalty and affection, then your basic worries in life are gone."

(Decathlete) Dan O'Brien: "...I'm a good husband, a good uncle. I once thought those were things that just happen. Now, I understand that you make them happen."

(Debilitated wrestling coach) Mike Powell: "You can be a macho man and love your wife. You can be a macho man and be sensitive." Mike tells wrestlers that he loves them and then, when they blush, he says there's no shame in expression. (Sports Illustrated, Feb. 13, 2012) "You don't have to say it back," he says. "Just know it's OK to say it."

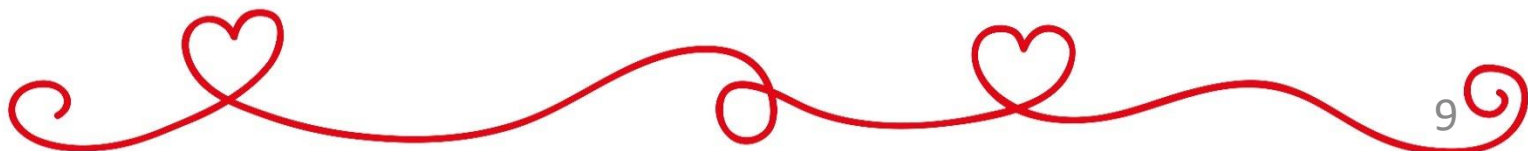
(Astronaut) John Glenn and his wife Annie: Asked in a People February 20, 2012 article: What's the secret of staying together for so long? They answered:

JG: "On April 6 it will be 69 years! We've never known a time when we didn't know each other. Our parents were good friends and visited back and forth. They used to kid us after we were married that they had us together in the playpen. And they did.

AG: "You know, growing up together as we did, all I can say is that we just enjoyed each other. And even now we like to be together. Every now and then we'll have an argument – everybody has arguments. But never in 69 years have we had a fight."

(Businessman and author) Harvey Mackay: "As I like to say, little things don't mean a lot – they mean everything."

So while our relationships may look different, whether you are an astronaut or a schoolteacher, loving, healthy relationships have the same foundation of everyday love, respect, and affection. May those of us in committed, happy relationships pay attention to the shared wisdom noted above and continue to show our significant other our love as if every day was Valentine's Day!



Ask-a-Coach

from [Relationship Coaching Institute](#)

Dear Coaches,

I know my husband loves me, but every year on Valentine's Day, he doesn't do anything for me. He says it is a ridiculous made up holiday.

I know I should appreciate my husband for showing every day he loves me, but Valentine's is special to me. I am not expecting gifts or an expensive dinner. I just want to celebrate a night of romance and intimacy with the man I love.

How do I show him that Valentine's Day matters to me?

~ Jamie, from Chicago



Dr. Jackie responds ...

It's Valentine's Day again! Have you ever stopped to consider where the most romantic places on Earth are?

They are inside you! They are in your imagination; and your heart; and your body; and your spirit!

Now is the time for you and your Sweetheart to put your heads together and build a list of all the romantic activities you can engage in – and never leave your house. That's right! Romance is not out there anywhere.

Love and romance reside inside you. Contemporary couples are so busy d-o-i-n-g and multi-tasking out in the world that you are forgetting how to BE with each other; enjoy each other; be tickled by each other; and connect deeply.

The time is now to be intentional and deliberate about connecting and having fun together. Food, (cooking together, a picnic in bed, or on the back porch, or patio), music, books, movies, a cozy fire, or a foot massage are just a few of the ways you can spend quality time together, connect with each other and have fun! Use your imagination.

If you think back to the best times in your life, those times will more than likely be

- (1) related to being engaged in an enjoyable activity;
- (2) with people whose company you were enjoying immensely.

Create that for yourselves together right now. Don't wait. We never know what tomorrow brings. That might sound corny, but it is truer than you know.

It's Valentines Day. Give yourself the Gift of each other; and enjoy!

Remember, only YOU can make it happen!

Dr. Jackie Black | www.DrJackieBlack.com

Want to Keep Love Alive? Here's How!

by [Charlie and Linda Bloom](#)

There is an idea going around that you may have heard, that long-term relationships eventually and inevitably become flat and boring. Unfortunately, all too many people believe this myth and act accordingly. That is, they expect this to happen and when they experience moments in which feelings of attraction, desire, or sexual excitement are not powerfully stimulating, they assume that the flame has gone out and that the future is bleak and uninspiring.



Possessed by this expectation, it's not surprising that many couples' relationships can begin an inexorable downward trajectory that all too often may end in separation or worse.

While it is not possible to prevent those moments from ever occurring, it *is* possible to strengthen the substance of a relationship in a way that minimizes their impact and diminishes the frequency of those occurrences. Not just a little bit, but to a very significant degree.

"What's the catch?", you might ask. There is none, that is, unless you call infusing your life with more fun and pleasure a catch. And yes, that is what it takes to make sure that you keep your relationship fresh, passionate, and exciting, whether you're twenty or ninety.

Lest you get into the "I'd-love-to-but-there's-not-enough-time" syndrome, let me remind you that it's never a matter of having *enough* time; it's always a matter of how you choose to prioritize your time. Many of us assign a higher priority to activities and commitments other than our relationships, not necessarily because we don't value our relationships, but often because we take them for granted and create the false belief that we can afford to neglect our connection or put it on cruise control. After all, we think, since we're committed, we're solid and we don't need to continue to put the time, attention, and energy into things that we did in the early days when our relationship wasn't so secure. Wrong. It's a big mistake to take your partnership for granted and assume that it doesn't require the same kind of care and attention that it did way back when. Worse, it can be a set up for disaster if this neglect continues for too long.

After a few years of married life, the inclination to take for granted what we used to appreciate can become strong, making it easy for a couple to slip into being roommates, business partners, and if they are raising children, co-parents. These are all important roles we find ourselves in each day, but if the relationship becomes defined by these roles, the important component of being lovers can be squeezed out.

In most relationships there is one partner who places a higher value than the other on romance. Contrary to popular opinion, it's not always the woman. But the person who is the stand for keeping romance alive will be more likely to notice when it is fading. Consequently, this person has more power to introduce corrections to bring more closeness and playfulness into the relationship. This is not to imply that he or she has the sole responsibility for keeping an eye on things, but rather because of this awareness, they are more capable of influencing the depth of connection in the relationship.

Want to Keep Love Alive? Here's How! Page 2

There are myriad ways to bring more of this spirit into a relationship. One way is to go out on a date. Dates aren't just for young lovers; they work magic for those of us who have been together for a while because going away from home provides a change of scenery, and enlivens things for both partners.

Staying home for a date can be fun too. You can have a romantic dinner by candlelight. Consider making date night a regular feature of your relationship. Dates don't have to be limited to a few hours together on an occasional evening; they can be an entire day, a weekend, or even longer, depending on the agreement you and your partner make with each other. And honeymoons (without the kids of course) aren't just for the newly married. Taking one every year is not too much. We know lots of people (including ourselves) who have made a tradition of this practice.

In honor of Valentine's Day, here are a few more ideas you might want to consider. Taking time to honor the intimacy component of your partnership can become habit-forming. Try some of these and add your own creative touches to the process of keeping romance alive.

1. Designate what we refer to as "Sacred time" and create a tech-free zone which will assure you that there will be NO interruptions. Then, enjoy.
2. Some delightful ways of spending an evening together don't cost anything. Going into the tub with each other, with candlelight of course, followed by more candlelight in the bedroom, is always a sure way to enhance the spirit of romance.
3. Take turns being in service to each other. You can bathe each other and wash each other's hair. You could shave his face and he could shave your legs (or vice versa –just kidding!)
4. Agree beforehand to feed each other every forkful of an entire meal. We know of a number of couples who have done this in restaurants, often to the surprise of other diners. Sit across the corner of the table so you can be close to each other. Feeding each other slows down the rate at which you eat. This is also a good way to lose weight, since generally, the slower we eat, the less we eat.
5. Spend time being connected through your eyes only, without the need to exchange words. While this may seem a bit awkward at first, after a few minutes you'll begin to settle in to the experience and you may begin to experience some surprisingly delightful feelings.
6. After dinner you can listen to music together, and might even want to dance. If you'd prefer privacy, try dancing with your partner in your own living room or bedroom. Another big advantage of dancing in your own home is that you can take your clothes off. You'll know for sure that you are not roommates or business partners when you're dancing nude!
7. Massage is another great way to keep romance alive. You don't need a massage table or fancy scented massage oils. Just take the cooking oil down from the kitchen shelf and lay down a towel on the bed or floor. And you don't have to be a professionally-trained masseuse or masseur to bring a loving touch.

Want to Keep Love Alive? Here's How! Page 3

8. Reading love poems to each other brings sweetness. If you enjoy the exotic, consider poetry from Rumi, Hafiz, or Kabir.

9. Love notes stuck in books, under plates and pillows and in the underwear drawer are sure to draw smiles of appreciation.

10. Last, but not least, is the way lovers talk romantic talk. It needs to be sincere, intimate, and full of feeling from the heart.

These emotional interchanges are the main meal. Sex is the desert, and it's non-fattening. Taking time out of our busy lives to make sure that the intimate aspects of our relationship is thriving works wonders for the partnership and our lives as a whole. Trying something new can promote more thrills and excitement than anxiety if we are mindful about the ways in which we approach change. We can rest assured that the lovers' aspect of our relationship is thriving when we're enjoying the art of bringing pleasure to each other. And we receive the added benefit of all those health-enhancing hormones running through our body that promote happiness and well-being. Mmmmmmm good!

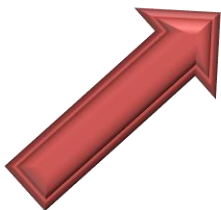




[Close Companions Online Relationship Academy](#)

Anytime, anywhere: our self-paced online courses are here for you!

[Learn More](#)



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