

q advice: WHEN THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

Understanding the honeymoon period - why it ends and what to do when it does?

Have you ever wondered why in the beginning romantic relationships are more intense, exciting and magnetic? Is this phase real or something made up in movies? Well, a study by psychiatrist Donatella Marrazziti and MD Domenico Canale compared



the hormones of couples who had recently fallen in love with couples in long lasting relationships. There findings showed that newly in love couples exhibited higher levels of hormones suggestive of stressful and arousing conditions when compared with couples in long lasting relationships. When they re-tested both groups 12-24 months later there was no significant difference in hormone levels indicating the honeymoon phase is real and does come to an end. The honeymoon moments are a privileged journey and love drug for those who are single and moving into a bonded relationship.

Enough with the hormones, why does the Honeymoon phase occur?

From a psychological perspective the honeymoon phase has several undercurrents. The first relates to the vulnerability and excitement of attachment insecurity. When two people meet there is no felt sense of a secure attachment bond. The unknown and the vulnerability heighten the experience of every bonding moment. Simple touch brings sparks, electricity and heartbeats. Moments and desires replayed in the mind long after the date ends.

Sexual tension and desire are also a strong undercurrent of the honeymoon phase. Tensions and urges rise and the physical sexual chemistry build, leading to exciting sexual encounters and post coitus highs. There is nothing more physically closer than sex and there is strong individual meaning and interpretation as a result of this which also fuses attachment bonding.

The final undercurrent relates to 'self-expansion' which is a term coined by Author Aron a professor of psychology at the State University of New York. Individuals seek to expand their sense of self by broadening experiences and learnings. When two worlds collide, you gain new experiences and insights. Your world expands through your partners, personality, culture, hobbies, work, friends, family and even location. Self-expansion is highly correlated with contentment and positive brain health. It is the opposite of stagnation and it fuels the good feeling in the relationship.

The fusion of these undercurrents plays a major role in the honeymoon phase.

However, in a longer secure relationship eventually partner attachment stabilises, sexual tension decreases, self-expansion is exhausted and the honeymoon phase comes to an end.

How do you keep recapturing that good feeling after the honeymoon phase?

Create some attachment tension: If your partner believes you would survive and thrive on your own then they are going to value you more. This means you are not co-dependent and are choosing each other making the relationship and interactions special. You achieve this by continuing to have healthy parts of you that are independent of the relationship. For example, make time for continued learning, personal friendships, your health, hobbies and other value-based activities. This is not about ignoring your partner or making them jealous. Rather, it is about continuing to learn and grow as an individual. When you have two partners who prioritise their relationship and value each other as individuals you keep the right amount of attachment tension to keep the sparks going.

Shahn Baker Sorekli & Helen Robertson

Bring attention back to sex and desire: Sex and desire is dynamic and evolving, requiring investment and attention if you want it to thrive. A positive sexual connection will enhance and bring new depths to your relationship. Couples who have a strong sexual connection also report higher levels of emotional closeness. Trying new things or exploring your sex life can bring back the sexual excitement experienced during the honeymoon phase.

Continue to create self-expansion:

Creating novel and exciting experiences together fortifies your relationship, because you continue to experience self-expansion. You continue to grow as an individual, which makes your relationship bond more valuable. Self-expansion safeguards your relationship and increases attraction in your relationship helping you recapture that special honeymoon energy.

Is it all downhill after the honeymoon phase?

Absolutely not! Positive Long-term relationships are a platform to live life in line with your values and goals. Love and acceptance have a positive effect on your mental health and well-being. A loving companion is there to celebrate the highs and ride out the lows with. A hand held while going to sleep, the offer of a cup of tea or the comfort of a hug offers a warm blanket even in the coldest of moments. Trust and love simply makes you stronger. Achieving joint goals and adventures brings a sense of mastery and couples' accomplishment. Even sex life in long term relationships can improve because there is less self-consciousness, less pressure and an openness to mutual exploration. The honeymoon coming to the end can be the beginning of a relationship which can hold the greatest joys life has to offer.

Shahn Baker Sorekli is a Clinical Psychologist and couples therapist, as well as the co-founder of the couples coaching app My Love Your Love. He is also the co-author of The 8 Love Links, a book designed to help individuals and couples develop deeper insights and strategies for stronger, more fulfilling relationships. For more information visit www.8lovelinks.com



THE LOVE 8 LINKS

Relationships are complicated but they hold the potential for life's greatest joys