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7 Ways to Get More Sex

This is episode 90 of Stay Happily Married, "7 Ways to Get More Sex."

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Lee Rosen: I'm Lee Rosen. I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I have on the telephone today Dr. Tina Lepage.

Tina is the founder of Lepage Associates, a practice over in Durham, North Carolina, and she specializes in personal and professional relationship issues. She deals with children and adolescents and does family counseling. She's a licensed psychologist. She's really done it all. She has developed and managed successful personal and professional growth programs for everybody: universities, corporations, the U.S. military. You name it, she has worked with them. And today we'll have to start calling her, I think, maybe The Love Doctor.

Tina, welcome back to the show.

Tina Lepage: Thank you. That's a great name. I'd like a fun name.

Lee Rosen: Oh, we'll call you -- who knows what we'll call you after this show.

Tina Lepage: Great.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Seven ways to get more sex. Let me just say, if I get -- I'll be busily taking notes, so if you notice any pauses --

Tina Lepage: I think that you can get the transcript afterwards, Lee, and just look back over and highlight what you need.

Lee Rosen: Maybe so. I don't know if I have time to wait for the transcript. I need this now.

Let me ask you this, though. How often is unhappiness, dissatisfaction, with the amount of sex an issue with the couples that you're seeing?

Tina Lepage: I think it's a common problem. It comes up quite often in couples therapy. Probably because when there are problems in the relationship then people tend to have less sex, if they're unhappy with them and there are other problems that they're presenting for in couples therapy. So I think that we see it quite often.

I also want to point out, though, that having a lack of sex or low amount of sex in the marriage doesn't always mean that there are other problems in the relationship. So sometimes it really just is problems around sex and the couple is quite happy with each other in other aspects of their relationship.

Lee Rosen: Well, how often are people having sex? What's the data tell you? You're a scientist.

Tina Lepage: Sure. There's some research that's done regularly in terms of asking married Americans how often that they have sex, and overall married couples are doing pretty well. Married couples say they have sex an average of a little bit more than once a week and married people actually have a few more sexual encounters per year than people who have never been married.

But there are some problems too. There are some marriages where about 15 to 20 percent of couples have sex not more than 10 times a year, and that would be then sort of defined as a sexless marriage. Twenty to 30 percent of men and 30 to 50 percent of women say that they have little or no sex drive. And about 25 percent of all Americans suffer from a condition known as hypoactive sexual desire, which is just basically defined as pretty much an absence of sexual fantasies or thoughts or a complete lack of interest in sex.

So I think the statistics sort of tell us that overall married couples are doing well; however, there are definitely slumps. They can last a long time. Children impact, the length of the relationship, boredom, etc., there are a lot of things that impact. So I think we're going to talk pretty directly today about sex and give people some practical advice as to how they can get more sex.

Lee Rosen: I love that you refer to it as a slump. So if you're in a slump and things aren't going the way you want them to, how does that impact the rest of the marriage?

Tina Lepage: I think it always takes a toll in some sense. So even though it's couples we see who are pretty much happy with each other and with the rest of the relationship, it still can have a negative impact in terms of diminishing their level of closeness. They might even become slightly depressed or moody; more unsatisfied with each other; become to feel maybe hopeless about the relationship being able to get better, or the sexual part of the relationship. So I think there's always an impact.

And also, there's no magic number that can tell people how often they should or shouldn't be having sex in order to be "normal." Sex drive really varies. And so if you feel like you want more sex, that's fine; that's just where you are in terms of what your needs are. And a good place to start with that is to start discussing with your partner sex, what you each want, etc., and to communicate about it.

Lee Rosen: Okay. I'm chomping at the bit. We promised seven ways to get more sex.

Tina Lepage: Right.

Lee Rosen: What's number one?

Tina Lepage: What's number one? All right. Well, how about before we do number one, even, I'm going to give an extra number eight that I think is important. So we are going to give eight instead of seven.

Lee Rosen: Okay.

Tina Lepage: And that's simply because the number eight is to say that to get more sex you have to actually do the things that we talk about today. And that may seem more obvious, but the number one place that people fail in terms of changing a behavior or something that they want different in their life is they don't follow through. So they get motivated, they do stuff like listen to this, they do some research, they make a plan, and then their life is busy and they don't follow through.

And so unfortunately for a lot of people listening today, they would listen, get excited about some of these ideas, and not go do them. And so what I'm going to challenge people to do is do these things. Like, number one, to get more sex you've got to actually take some action here and do something differently.

Lee Rosen: Okay. Makes sense. Where do we go from there?

Tina Lepage: All right. So from there the first thing that I would say to get more sex is to take the lead by communicating your own desires to your partner and by finding out exactly what your partner likes. And then initiate sex by doing what your partner likes. So basically, you have to do what turns your partner on, because if you want more sex the number one thing that you need is a willing partner.

Lee Rosen: Makes sense.

Tina Lepage: If you think about it, in our minds we often approach sex as a series -- you know, when you're thinking about sex, it's sort of a series of visions of what you would like to happen and what you would feel pleasurable to your own body. But the best way to get there is to arouse the other person so that they're engaged in sex with you and doing those things to your body.

Lee Rosen: Right. I'm buying it. Makes sense so far. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: Right. So you have to have sort of this other focus, I think, if you want to get more sex. And one caveat that I will give around this is that when couples start to talk about what each other wants I often see that they will let some of their gender-based opinions get in the way.

So for example, over and over here men say things like you shouldn't need flowers to want to have more sex, she shouldn't need a clean house to want to have more sex, those are just avoidance things. Or women will say sex is just perfunctory for him; it's all about the act; he wants more oral sex; he wants more this or that but it's not about being close to me.

So what I say to people again, if we're just talking about getting more sex, is put those things aside. You have to ask yourself what you want. Do you want to have more sex or do you want to have a discussion or an argument about the differences between what men and women want? If you want more sex, do what your partner tells you to do in terms of getting them ready, getting them in the mood, etc.

Lee Rosen: Clean the house or buy the flowers.

Tina Lepage: Right. Or giving more oral sex, right?

Lee Rosen: Right. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: It can be whatever they're asking for. So that would be -- number one -- summarizing that, number one is take the lead, find out what turns your partner on and do it, and let your partner know what you like as well.

Lee Rosen: Well, I'll tell you a little secret. I have an account with a florist. I can just --

Tina Lepage: That's a good thing.

Lee Rosen: I just call them and they'll bill me. It's no problem. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: Right. You just let it go. I had a friend once who had said he doesn't -- he stopped thinking about why when it -- why does my wife need to have jewelry as a gift? Why does my wife need this or that? He's like, "I just don't ask why. I just -- whatever she wants, if it makes her happy, good."

Lee Rosen: Right. Yes, dear. Just do it. I get you. Okay. That's number one. That's a good one. What's number two?

Tina Lepage: So in number one we're focusing on being the initiator and number two is sort of the opposite side of that. And that is when your partner approaches you for sex, stop what you're doing and say yes.

Lee Rosen: Not a problem for me.

Tina Lepage: Well, you know, you say that and it may not be for you. But I will say that we hear couples say this a lot, that there are small responses, such as: I want to finish this TV show. I want to finish this computer game. Just let me finish unloading the dishwasher. The kids aren't asleep yet; let's wait until the kids are asleep. And those types of things can really result in the moment getting lost. So it may even be the person who's saying that is thinking, "Oh, yay. We're going to have sex as soon as I finish this, this and this," but then the moment gets lost.

And another thing with that is if you're tired or you're not in the mood, to just go with it anyway. Because again, if you're thinking, "I want to have more sex in my life," and you have a partner who's approaching you for sex, then just go with it. You might need more of a foreplay or a warm-up period to get in the mood because your mind wasn't there to start, but that's fine. Just sort of shift your focus and number two is adopting a "just say yes" approach.

Lee Rosen: Just say yes.

Tina Lepage: Just say yes.

Lee Rosen: That is my favorite tip so far. I will say, we're only to number two and I'm already loving this. Yeah. This is fantastic. Just say yes. Okay.

Ready, set, go. What's number three?

Tina Lepage: All right. So number three is to be willing to compromise and incorporate into sex some of the things that your partner really likes, even if you don't particularly enjoy that thing. And so I heard one time the comedian Paul Reiser talking about sex and he said if you freeze-frame sex at any given moment one person is thinking, "Oh, my God, this is so great; this feels so good," and the other person is thinking, "When's it my turn?"

So I think he's sort of overstating it. Obviously there are times during sex that both people are enjoying it equally, but there is that point that there are differences in what people find sexually pleasurable. And if your partner has sort of figured out over some years of marriage that the things that aren't your favorite things are never going to happen for them, even if they're their favorite things, that can really diminish your partner's interest in sex.

And so -- you want to jump in, say anything?

Lee Rosen: No, no, no. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: So just go ahead and keep talking about. You're just taking notes, aren't you?

Lee Rosen: I'm scribbling. Yeah. That noise in the background is --

Tina Lepage: You're not even going to participate that much today.

Lee Rosen: Right. Just keep going, keep going.

Tina Lepage: Keep going. All right. Well, so some of the examples that couples bring up around this when they come in for couples therapy, some common examples are oral sex and also foreplay, whether it's extending the length of foreplay or diminishing the length of foreplay. So we'll use these examples because they come up often.

So what I would say is then, for example, if you don't like performing oral sex but your partner really likes receiving it, then think about under what conditions it's been not as bad for you. So

for example, people who dislike performing oral sex will sometimes say that in the shower or just after a shower is more acceptable for them. They may use scented oils, etc., that type of thing.

Or if you look at foreplay, if women -- generally it's women wanting more foreplay and men wanting less. Not always. But if you know as a man that your partner wants more foreplay then just approach sex as, okay, I'm going to give this an extra 10 or 15 minute. And that gets you to your goal of having more sex.

And for women, really the opposite is true. Engaging in the occasional quickie -- have lubrication available so that that's possible -- and again, sort of back to the idea of letting your partner get the idea that things are going to happen for them that they really love, even if it's not your favorite thing.

And certainly the point here is not to compromise so much that sex is not enjoyable to you, and no one should do something that they find hurtful or offensive. The point is more, just like all areas of marriage, there's some -- having some level of compromise can make that part of the relationship better.

Lee Rosen: Right. That all makes sense. It's not as much fun as "just say yes," but --

Tina Lepage: I don't know. What's fun about this stuff is that -- I kind of focus a lot from the perspective of what you can do because people come in and think, "If only my partner did X, Y and Z."

Lee Rosen: Right.

Tina Lepage: But again, if you look at sex -- if you do these things, then it's likely that your partner's going to do these things back. So if you do things for your partner, for example, that she really loves that aren't your favorite, the hope would be then she's going to do things for you that you really love.

Lee Rosen: Right. It makes a lot of sense. And if it's what you really want and this is what you need to do to get what you want, it's like, well, then why aren't you doing it?

Tina Lepage: Right.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. It makes perfect sense.

Okay. That's three. What's number four?

Tina Lepage: Number four is to schedule sex dates. And so we tend to have very busy lives. People work a lot -- for some people that's work plus kids in their marriage -- and sex can really take a back seat, particularly if you're supposed to sort of fit it in after everything else. You have to go to work, take care of the kids, spend time with the kids, have family time, take care of the house, pay the bills. The list kind of goes on and on. And the things that tend to get done in our lives are the things that we schedule.

So I tell people who come in for couples therapy and this is a problem, let's choose a time each week that you're going to schedule a sex date.

Lee Rosen: Probably don't want to put that on the calendar at the office.

Tina Lepage: Well, you might not want to put that on a public calendar, yeah.

Lee Rosen: yeah. But, yeah, schedule it. Like you said, what gets scheduled gets done. That makes sense. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: Absolutely. And we talk about don't worry that you're not going to be in the mood. It can be a weekly scheduled sort of sensual time; there doesn't have to be an absolute pressure to have sex. The goal is certainly that that would happen often during this time, but you can spend time with your partner doing sensual things, relaxing, listening to music, giving each other a massage. We suggest you kind of keep the conversation on light topics. Those types of things.

Lee Rosen: But you know -- okay. So I love that idea, but realistically in modern America, you schedule something and then the next thing you know you've got a kid needing something or -- you know what I mean. It's like it's hard to stick to that kind of schedule, isn't it?

Tina Lepage: It can be. I think that part of that is -- what you're talking about is making sure that you have a successful plan set upfront. So you don't want to schedule your sex date during a time that your kid is going to be running in and out of your bedroom.

On the other hand, you don't have to worry as much as people sometimes do about the kids being around. In other words, you're not going to tell your kids, "This is our time that we're going to have sex," obviously. But you can tell your kids that this is Mommy and Daddy's special couple time, this is our alone time, whatever you want to call it.

If you have a kid who's 9 or 10 years old, they can get up on a Saturday morning, get their own cereal, play in their play room,

watch cartoons, etc., and they can understand that Saturday morning is Mommy and Daddy's special alone time.

Your teenagers too. If you want to say, "Hey, Friday night is a night where we do our own thing. We hang out in our room. We have couple time and we don't want you guys to bug us unless, obviously, it's some type of an emergency," you can put that boundary there. You can take time in your own house to have your couple time or your alone time together.

Some people worry that their teens will figure out that they're having sex, which if your teens figure that out probably they won't care because teens are very self-involved, or they'll just think that it's gross. They'll think, "Oh, god."

Lee Rosen: Yeah. Mine would totally figure it out and totally be self-involved.

Tina Lepage: Yeah. They'll just think that it's disgusting that their parents are having sex. But really, there's nothing wrong -- you don't have to have the topic of sex or the idea of sex completely hidden from your children, because in fact them seeing as a role model that their parents are two adults who have kids, who are still in love, still have sex, make time for themselves, that's not necessarily a bad role model for them to take into their own marriages later.

Lee Rosen: Right. So you have to sit down I guess each week and renegotiate the next sex date?

Tina Lepage: I mean, like all things on a schedule, it works the best if it's the same time. So I would say if you can have your sensual time -- it will work the best if you're able to say it's always this day of the week at this time. Certainly you might have to renegotiate some, depending on what's happening in life. But if you can pick a time of the day that's two or three hours that you have this sensual alone time where you don't allow any distractions and you just focus on each other, this can really work. And we've seen it work for a lot of couples.

And I do want to point out this is not the same as date night, so don't confuse those things. Date night might end in sex; it might not end in sex. Date night is usually just more about spending time together without work or the kids. So this date is really a sex or sensual date that's specifically about sexual closeness.

Lee Rosen: And if you only have a limited amount of time, definitely schedule sex dates but date night, you know, whenever.

Tina Lepage: That's people's personal preference. I would say at least make sure that you do one every other week if that's all the time you have. But sex makes people feel closer and it's great for marriages so --

Lee Rosen: Okay. There you go. Okay. That's four. We're working our way through the top seven here. What's number five?

Tina Lepage: Number five is to set the stage for sex. And this is sort of a bigger topic than you might think when you hear "set the stage," because there's the big picture of setting the stage for sex and then there's the in-the-moment part of setting the stage for sex.

So in the big picture, this really involves creating a sensual environment between you and your partner. And that means things like complimenting one another, engaging in sexual talk. If you have a sexual thought about your partner in the middle of the day, send him or her an e-mail or a text saying what that thought was. Holding hands, kissing hello and goodbye, having that sort of physical closeness between the two of you.

The bigger picture can also mean doing romantic things for your partner, such as leaving a love note or something, or planning a romantic date. And one thing I'd say around this is romance doesn't have to be expensive. If you have one flower with a little note that says "I love you as much as the day I married you," that would really be just as effective as a big bunch of flowers.

Lee Rosen: Right. Just steal a flower from your neighbor's yard.

Tina Lepage: There you go. Just pick a flower from outdoors and put a sweet little note on it.

Lee Rosen: Right. But you're basically doing the little things -- the prep work, I guess -- so that the "just say yes" when we get to that point doesn't seem like such a foreign idea.

Tina Lepage: Absolutely. You're setting that stage of closeness between you and your partner.

And another part of setting the stage means making yourself feel sexy for your partner and for yourself. And I also say for yourself too because we tend to be more interested in sex when we feel attractive and sexy ourselves. So there's that piece of feeling good about yourself.

Also, helping make your partner sexy to you. So for example, for a woman, if you like the way your husband looks in a certain kind of

brief, you can buy those for him and tell him he looks great in them, that sort of thing. So you're kind of setting the stage to make sure that you feel attractive and feel sexy.

And one thing around this I would say to people is make sure that this is something they can do in the short-term, such as how can you feel sexy this week? And not have it be just a long-term thing. Because for example, we have -- so many people in this country are overweight that when we talk about this in couples therapy people often say, "Well, I'd feel sexier if I lost weight."

Lee Rosen: Yeah. But you're not going to do that overnight. That's like a long-term goal, I guess.

Tina Lepage: Exactly. It's a great goal. And losing weight can definitely increase energy and self-esteem and sex drive, so it's a great goal. But it can take a while. So we would say make sure that things in the moment, whether it's lingerie -- for women it's often times what they're wearing, etc. People do those types of things so that they're setting that stage in the moment.

Also I would say in terms of setting the stage, notice when you feel most sexy and notice when your partner is most sexy to you and then initiate sex during those times. So that's part of setting the stage is being in the mood and noticing when you're really attracted to your partner and when you're really feeling kind of attractive yourself.

Lee Rosen: Right. You know, when you said "set the stage" I had this flash of the whole sexual fantasy thing and that's where I sort of thought you were going with this. But it sounds like you're sort of heading in a different direction.

Tina Lepage: That's part of it. That's part of the in-the-moment is that fantasies can also definitely help set the stage. And so it's not that you can play out a fantasy every single time you have sex, but for one thing just talking about the fantasy itself can be arousing and sensual, and then picking some fantasies or components of them that you can play out with one another. Doing that can certainly add some spice to the sexual routine with your partner.

And then somewhat related to that is that sort of in the moment take the couple of minutes that it would take to make sure that you're free of distractions. Make the room sensual. Put on candles or low light or music. Really it only takes maybe five minutes or less to do some of those things and yet it makes that environment so much sexier.

Lee Rosen: Right. All those practical things you get from the movies but they really do work. Yeah. Makes sense.

Okay. What's number six?

Tina Lepage: Number six is to be healthy. And really health is the most important thing in your life, and I mean here both your physical health and your mental health. Anyone who's ever been without their physical or mental health knows this and yet we can take it for granted. And when you're thinking about, okay, seven ways to get more sex and how do we -- this doesn't sound as obvious as to just say yes, let's say.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Tina Lepage: However, huge impact here. I mean, there's tons of research to show that physical ailments and excess weight tend to take away energy and diminish sex drive; whereas being physically fit, well-rested, regular exercise, all of those things increase energy, increase sex drive. And in terms of mental health too, common ailments such as depression or anxiety diminish sex drive, not having a good work-life balance, too little sleep, not having time for yourself to relax; all of those things diminish sex drive.

So really, when physical or mental health problems start to occur you want to address them immediately, get professional help early in the process if you need it, because really your sex life suffers when you're not healthy. So if you want to have more sex in your life, making sure that you pay attention to your physical and mental health is important.

Lee Rosen: Well, I always notice, just like the exercise, it really does put you in a good mood.

Tina Lepage: Oh, yeah.

Lee Rosen: I mean, it's hard to get going but once you get going it perks you up.

Tina Lepage: Absolutely.

Lee Rosen: I encouraged my wife to go for a run a couple -- I guess two weeks ago. And she headed out the door and it was raining a little bit. I got a call 20 minutes later she had fallen and twisted her ankle. Had to pick her up and take her to the urgent care. So it didn't really work out the way I had hoped.

Tina Lepage: Okay. That was not a day where you were getting more sex.

Lee Rosen: Yeah. No. No. A lot of swollen ankle stuff. Yeah. Not good. Not good.

Okay. That's six. What's number seven?

Tina Lepage: Number seven is do what's needed to have a happy relationship. So if you have unresolved conflicts between the two of you, if you're dissatisfied in the relationship, if your emotional needs aren't being met, etc. -- misunderstandings, poor communication, all of that stuff -- not having enough quality time together.

Basically, if you're not doing the work to have a happy relationship then you may both not be that interested in sex because you're not that connected to the relationship. So make a happy relationship a priority. Spend time together, have date nights, take couples trips, etc.

And I also would mention here if you can't resolve problems on your own to go to couples therapy, get help. It tends to be very effective. You learn a lot of the things that you need to learn to resolve what's problematic in the relationship and then from there, again, once the relationship is better you tend to end up having more sex in the relationship.

Lee Rosen: Right. Seems logical. If you're happy together, the next thing you know you're going to be having more sex.

Tina Lepage: Absolutely. And like we started out saying, as related to sex being our topic today, there are lots of couples therapists out there who are well-versed in sex therapy. And if the relationship is good and it's just the sex, you can still go in and have that person sort of help you talk about the stuff that's getting in the way of you having a better sex life.

Lee Rosen: Right. Well, it's sort of making our way back to where we started. You know, when I asked you for tip number one you said you were going to slip one in there before number one, and it's this whole idea of you've just got to do it. You've got to do the tips -- the seven tips -- or it's not going to work.

And I do -- I mean, there are some of them that are really easy but some of them are hard and they take time. And I do think it's like everybody wants a quick fix. Everything you've said makes perfect sense and I can see where it all works, but your number one piece of

advice: You've got to do this stuff if you're going to get the result you want. Makes sense.

Tina Lepage: Absolutely. And don't let it feel overwhelming. Like you're saying, some of this stuff can seem quick and easy and some of it can seem not so quick and easy. But I would say either going back and listening again if you weren't taking notes the first time, or download the transcript -- I think they can probably do that on your site --

Lee Rosen: Right.

Tina Lepage: -- at Stay Happily Married -- and look back and make a plan, "Okay. Here are the two or three things I can do --" you know, "Here's the one thing I can do immediately. I can start doing this this week. And then here are some other small things that I can do." And sort of make sure that you incorporate them and that you're doing it.

Lee Rosen: And the next thing you know, you're having more sex than you ever dreamed.

Tina Lepage: Hey, if the point is to have more sex -- I mean, if you're listening to this and you want more sex --

Lee Rosen: That is the point. Yeah.

Tina Lepage: -- then here are some great ways to get more sex.

Lee Rosen: Right.

Tina Lepage: If you're feeling like, "I can't do that; that will take too long," etc., just think for a minute what do you want? "Oh, I want more sex." Okay. So go ahead and do these things.

Lee Rosen: Do the seven things. The next thing you know, you're going to have what you wanted. I agree. I agree wholeheartedly. And everything you've said makes perfect sense. And I will be taking my list home with me tonight.

Tina Lepage: I've already shared my list with my husband since I was working on putting this together.

Lee Rosen: Got you. Got you. Well, Tina, thank you so much for helping us figure out how to get more sex. I appreciate it.

Tina Lepage: Sure. Nice being with you again.

Lee Rosen:

If you'd like to find out more about Tina Lepage, she has a website at LepageAssociates.com. I'm going to put a link to it in the show notes, but let me spell it for you. It's L-e-p-a-g-e Associates dot com. Lots of good information there about Tina and about the staff that works there. And they have a lot of articles and links to other resources. It's a lot more than just about their practice. Lots of good resources, so check it out.

You can also reach the office by phone. They're at (919) 572-0000 in Durham, North Carolina.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope that you will join us again next week. We would love to hear your comments in the meantime about this show or any of our shows. The feedback we get from you is terrific. You've given us lots of great ideas for upcoming shows and guests and all of that.

You can reach us on our comment line at (919) 256-3083 or you can e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Lee Rosen. Until next time, stay happily married.

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