

Lee: This is Episode Number 189 of Stay Happily Married: Add Spice to Your Love Life.

Announcer: Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Lee: I'm Lee Rosen, and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. Is your relationship lacking the necessary spice to keep it going? We all hit a plateau in our relationship. Maybe, we're sick of our routine; maybe, the sex has gotten boring and stale. Whatever the cause, we have the solution.

Our guest today, Dr. Judy Kuriansky, she has all the answers you need to spice up your relationship and make sex exciting again. Dr. Judy Kuriansky is a woman of many accomplishments in the field of clinical psychology. She works as a certified sex therapist, a couple's counselor, a marriage counselor, a writer and a professor. She's an internationally respected psychologist who teaches at Columbia University Teacher's College. She's an Honorary Professor at China's Beijing Medical School. She's been on, gosh, every radio and TV show you can imagine, whether it's Oprah or Larry King Live or CNN. She runs workshops and seminars for the public and for professional groups, dealing with dating and love and interpersonal relations.

She's the author of a bunch of relationship focused books including "Generation Sex", "The Complete Idiot's Guide to a Healthy Relationship," "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Tantric Sex". In her free time, she's also a humanitarian and a peace activist. Her band has played for the Dalai Lama. And as an NGO Representative for the United Nations, she's helped to educate others on HIV prevention. We're pretty lucky to have her on the show. Dr. Judy, welcome to the show. I am so glad you could join us.

Judy: What a pleasure. There is a lot of interest in having relationships work and keeping them hot and keeping them alive.

Lee: Keeping them hot, that is exactly right. We're calling this episode Add Spice to Your Love Life, so let's get to spicy. But before we do that, let me ask you, what's the deal? Why do relationships have this tendency to sort of get old and tiresome? Why aren't they that energized way that they are at the beginning?

Judy: Well, the answer is people don't work at it. Really. I've always said a relationship works and stays hot and stays spicy when both people want it to. We just have to continue dating. When you're dating someone, you want to impress them. You want to put your best foot forward. You want them to know all about what your favorite color is and how you liked to be touched.

And then people just get lazy, and they start having all these arguments and problems about all kinds of things like money and kids and where to live and who's spending enough time with whom and doing what. And these kinds of things erode the excitement and romanticism and the sexiness, and that is the problem. You have to compartmentalize

those things, and then you won't fall prey to the seven year itch, and the seven month itch and the seven hour itch.

Lee: [laughs]

Judy: It's gone down.

Lee: The seven hour itch. Let me ask you though, I'm getting the idea that maybe, if your relationship is boring and your sex life is not really any fun to you anymore that that, I assume, that's a sign of incompatibility. That maybe, this just isn't going to work out. Do you see it in a different way?

Judy: There certainly, indeed, are relationships that probably aren't destined to be together. That if the people are not getting along, then I am always a fan of saying: look, don't stay in agony, leave it on good terms for sure. But, many times people opt out way too quickly, and that's what's happening in this world. It's been happening for a long time. I've been in this business for many, many decades, heard thousands of people's questions over the years on radio and in magazines and television. And I just notice that people are getting very, very short lived in their reactions.

And you know what? It has a lot to do with the technology age and the internet. It's gotten even worse because before people used to email and that was a little bit longer. Now they're texting and using short cuts all the time. And so, it's the same in relationships. It's like the narcissism that we suffered through in the '80s and '90s where people were all about me, me, me has now become technological easy come, easy go. Fast paced.

Lee: Wow.

Judy: If it's not working, bye-bye. And that's the sadness of it. So, the answer to that is to slow down, take your time. Give relationships time to nurture and simmer. Stop doing all this fast cooking and get back to the simmering.

Lee: Right, a little simmering. Now you mentioned, and you're sort of joking, but I'm reading between the lines, you're talking about the seven year itch and the seven month itch and the seven minute itch. Is there really, are these real, these seven year itches and all of that?

Judy: Well, they are real in the sense that that's what history has shown us, and we even now have examples of this in celebrities' lives that has been made a big deal out of. Demi Moore and Ashton Kutcher, for example, being the latest one where on the eve of their 7th anniversary, he's all of a sudden off with somebody else. And there have been other celebrities who have fallen apart after seven years. So, there are marked times when people do get bored, and unfortunately it's gotten less than seven years, people don't even last that long. They last a little bit longer when they have children, so they stay a bit.

And this is not such a happy message, and I certainly don't want people to follow this, but anthropologist, Margaret Meade, said that the natural cycle of a relationship was even four years because after the children are born it takes four or more so years before they're really able to be a bit on their own, and so that's when the couple starts re-examining their relationship. So, I'm just saying that there are some anthropological messages about that, but I don't want people to follow it.

For so many years that I've been a counselor, my work has been to help people make it work and the answer is: don't fall so quickly into it because then you're not prepared. Give it time for you to learn about each other and then there won't be surprises.

Lee: Right. That makes a lot of sense. What are the signs that a relationship has really, it's getting old, it's getting stale? How do you know that that's what's going on?

Judy: It's fun that you asked me that because I've outlined a bunch of that in my book, "The Complete Idiot's Guide to a Healthy Relationship", and I use it as the green lights, the yellow lights and the red lights. And obviously, the lights that you should really pay caution to are when you're choosing not to spend that much time with each other and instead choosing to be apart with other people, when you don't share time as much as you used to, when you're arguing more than you're enjoying each other. And also, I have to say as a sex therapist, when the sex has gone out the window and when you're angry with each other more than you're happy with each other and when you're unhappy in your own life and it's spilling over to other aspects of your life. I'd say those are a lot of signs to look for that it's gone bad.

Lee: Right. Those are good signs, but we have a tough time evaluating sort of where we stand in our relationship and how it's going. And we look at our friends' relationships, and we try to compare ourselves: how are they doing, how are we doing? Is that an OK way to figure out if you're doing OK?

Judy: People will endlessly do that, Lee. They just tend to look at what's going on, but certainly we've learned that the grass is never greener. I would say though that if you're looking at a good relationship, use that as a model, rather than relationships that have gone bad or where you're commiserating all the time. Find a couple and friends who are making it work, who do have some romance in their life and share some of that. It does spill over. The negatives will spill over and so do the positives.

Lee: Right. That makes a lot of sense, to use it as a model. What's sort of the quick check list for knowing that a relationship really is healthy? If I'm looking at either my relationship or another one, what are the signs that things are going the way they ought to be going?

Judy: Well, great, because that is exactly the opposite of the signs that we were talking about before when it's not going well. When you choose to be with one another, when you look forward to each other, when you want to please one another, when you're always being thoughtful about what can I do to make the other person happy, when

you're looking forward to plans that you have, when you want to be with your partner even more than you'd like to be on your own or with other people and when you feel that you make good decisions together, when you're really considering each other's opinions which is important.

As a sex therapist again, I'd have to say, when you're having sex and even if it's not great all the time. If you're looking at how to keep it going well and keep it sexy.

Lee: Right. Those are good signs. That makes a lot of sense to me. What do you see people doing when they know, it's a little stale but they're doing what you're suggesting. They want to keep it going, they want to spice it up, and they want to keep it interesting. How are they going about doing that? What are they trying? What do their efforts look like?

Judy: Well, the advice that I often give is, first of all, to make some specific time when you are uninterrupted that's just for each other. It could be on a Tuesday and Thursday night for an hour, or it could be Saturday afternoon or Sunday, as long as it's time together that's uninterrupted, that's one thing. Another is for you to continually come up with new ideas. That's my favorite part. People start getting lazy. When you're dating, you come up with fun things that you want to do together, I mean, even if you chose a movie it's something that you discuss or you think you would both enjoy.

But there are other interesting things to do. Going for a walk on a beautiful day, going bike riding together, doing a sport or going to an art exhibit together. These are the kinds of things that you do with friends or on a date and my whole principle in the "Complete Idiot's Guide to a Healthy Relationship" is to go back to the "Complete Idiot's Guide to Dating" and that is date each other the way you would when you were first going out. Some of the advice that I give to couples when they're in my office and they need to spice up their relationship is I say, even, what were the things that you did when you were first going out?

How did you treat one another? What was the sex like and the seduction like? Re-enact that as if it's a movie. And some people feel, oh that sounds so like not really natural, but if they do it, it's all of a sudden, yes, I remember, I recall those feelings. They're locked in the cells of the body and they get re-awakened.

Lee: Right. What if one spouse wants to spice it up but the other one doesn't care? What do you do in that scenario?

Judy: Well, that is a difficult one, Lee. You really can lead the horse to water, but you can't make it drink. You can do your best to see what is it that is making your partner hesitate. Are there what we call gunny sacked angers? Has there been built up resentments that are resisting that person from really letting go and being happy? That's what I work on with couples. What may have happened? And I ask them to even talk about it. What are the built up resentments, angers or upsets that you have? Let's clear the air.

Lee: Right. This is sort of a chicken or the egg question, but do you work on the sex life first or the relationship issues first? Or where do you have to start?

Judy: It's a mix really, going back and forth. Because some couples may come to me, for example, and say they're having trouble in their sex life or they never have sex, or he's not interested or she's always got a head ache or something like that. And so, you can start with, well, tell me how often it's happening? What is going on when you're not interested? Are you really tired? Are you really angry? Or are you feeling badly about your body? Do you feel undesirable?

And then always to get to OK, what's going on in the relationship? How have you been getting along? What are the angers that are about other things other than sex? How have you been making decisions together? What have been the stresses in each one of your lives? So, it's always getting down to the two things and that's why I think it's important if you're going to see somebody to see somebody who is a psychologist and a counselor who's accredited besides being a so-called sex therapist, because honestly, Lee, you can't just solve the sex problem these days.

You can't just go in and say OK, I want you both to pick those days, and I want you to please one other in ten minutes for pleasing her and ten minutes for pleasing him and just touch the breasts and the non-sexual parts first and then get to the sexier parts. You can't just do that. There are people's feelings that are associated with sexuality. So, you have to deal with both.

Lee: Yeah. I hear you and that message, it would be nice if there were a simple formula but obviously there just isn't. Now, coming to see you...

Judy: Some people love this idea of sex therapy has really gotten a hold, and it's amazing because I was a pup and the protégé of all of the people and the Masters and the Johnsons of the world who were the big superstars and I was in college when they were already making their mark on developing this field.

And so, now I've become the sort of grandfathering, grandmothering of young kids who want to be... I want to be a sex therapist, just like they want to be a policeman or a lawyer or a banker, these days. And so, they have to really understand that sex therapy is not just like you said, simple one, two, three, touch here, squeeze there, move this, that position. No. It's about how do you feel about the sexual positions and activity.

Lee: Well, we all like short cuts, but it doesn't sound like there are any. Now, coming to see a counselor, a marriage counselor or a sex therapist feels like a pretty extreme step for most of us, anyway. It's a little scary to do that. Do you think it's necessary when you're in this kind of zone of things are feeling stale, you are taking each other for granted, you're not paying that much attention to each other? Do you need to go and see a professional, or can you fix it without one?

Judy: You can sometimes fix it without one by following good self-help books if you really are doing the activities in it, but it's always good, I think, Lee, to see somebody who acts as a referee, who can really listen to one person and the other and really give each a chance to talk and then give some simple suggestions and then get to the deeper issues. It's very hard to do that on your own because sex is a hot topic. We said it should be hot, but it's a hot topic.

People argue about that and money the most, and raising kids. And it's very hard to get past some of the difficulties with saying the words to the partner without people getting their buttons pushed. So, fortunately, it's gotten less of a problem to see somebody professional lately, and there's much more talk in the media about it as we're doing right now.

There's been a lot of talk even about Tantra. That's why I wrote the "Complete Idiot's Guide to Tantric Sex" which is an incredibly wonderful way for people to get back their intimacy. Notice I said, intimacy as opposed to just sex. Even though the book and the techniques are called tantric sex, it's really about creating the intimacy and the closeness and the feeling of trust that allows for sex.

That's why I said, Lee, it's not about pinch here, touch here, stroke there, move in this position, put your leg up there. It's about how do you feel trusting and loving and open to the other person so that you want them to touch you and you want to submit.

Lee: Right. What happens when you do get it back on track and the sex life is back the way you want it to, where you want it to be, does it tend to fade over time, just like it did in the first place? How do you prevent that if that's inevitable?

Judy: You're right. It's kind of like exercise, right? You exercise, and then you build up your muscles just like your building up your sex muscles through what we're talking about, and then if you go for a time, what happens to your muscles?

Lee: They atrophy, yeah.

Judy: Yeah, they get a little lax and they atrophy. Same thing with everything that has to do with marital therapy and counseling and having a good relationship and having good sex, you work it at it a little bit. I had to use that word, work at it, because then people think it should come naturally, but you have to pay attention and make it a priority and then do the things that actually do that by leaving surprises for one another.

In the "Idiot's Guide to a Healthy Relationship" I have a calendar, where people write in your calendar what you're going to do to please the other person. It really is where you do the best, his best night and her best night and or his and his or hers and hers or whatever, and you make this a practice. That's what we call it. Just like you practice other things. Just like you brush your teeth and pay attention to cleaning your house and taking care of your kids.

Lee: Well, if you're going to practice something, this sounds like a pretty good thing to have to practice. What else should we know before I let you go today?

Judy: I think you should know that everybody is entitled to enjoy their life, and that sex and a good sex life and a good relationship, it has been even proven by research, is insurance for good health. There are so many studies that have shown that people who have a good relationship live longer, and that when that relationship involves some sort of intimacy it's even better and when the intimacy involves touching, that touching is healing.

Stroking is healing. There have been all kinds of studies about that. It reduces your blood pressure, it gets the chemicals going in your brain, and so there's a lot of good evidence that good lovin' and good sex will give you long life and happiness.

Lee: Terrific note to end on. Dr. Judy, thank you so much for being with us today.

Judy: What a pleasure. You were great.

Lee: To find out more about Dr. Judy Kuriansky, you can visit her website at DrJudy.com, that's D-R-J-U-D-Y.com, or you can reach her directly at 212-307-6771. Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. We always love hearing from you. If you'd like to comment on this or any other episode, you can reach our listener comment line at 919-256-3083 or you can email us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

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

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