

# Find voice in marriage

## QUESTION:

My wife is angry with me because we do not have sex very often. We have been married for seven years and I find that she is always disappointed in me. She can be critical in the company of others and I find this embarrassing. Nothing is ever OK — how much money I make, how I look, but particularly how I find it hard to be intimate with her. I have taken a drop in income recently and have gained a lot of weight so I do see her point. Also, I can be distant and silent and it's true that I find it hard to be affectionate with her. Yesterday she said that I am not a real man and that I need Viagra. My friend says that he is always up for sex no matter how his relationship is going. What should I do?

## Answer:

Like your friend, many men find that their sex drive is strong enough to override the tensions in their marriage. Women are more commonly put off sex by their unhappiness with their partners than are men. However, there are many differences among men and among women and hormones are only one of them.

The big question here is not the sexual question. It's the more complex question about your avoidance of your wife. She is turning into a steamroller and she needs a partner who will stand both with and against her. You are as big a piece of the problem here as she is. She gets in your face and you run from her. Neither one of these reactions is good. They describe the feedback loop that the two of you have created in your failed efforts to com-



municate. Fight and flight are not the only options when tensions are high. Someone has to break the loop. Here are a few thoughts:

■ The most common casualty in a marriage is the loss of the individual identities of the two people who commit to being a couple. Holding on to who we are in the face of a challenging partner is difficult. In an effort to keep the waters calm we can sometimes get lost at sea. Standing against your wife means taking a position for yourself that is calm, clear, open and connected.

■ Get your focus off your wife and onto yourself. You will have to manage your physiology in order to think. It is almost always a mistake to continue a conversation if your heart rate is over 90. If you can slow down and breathe you may be able to keep your oars in the water when a storm is on the horizon.

■ What is your history with conflict and criticism? How were they handled in the family in which you grew up? Family dynamics represent the blueprint of our emotional imprinting and can tell us a lot about our

sensitivities. This knowledge is useful in identifying and adapting our patterns of interaction.

Our sexuality is connected to more than our hormone levels. The saying that “our brain is our biggest sexual organ” is at least somewhat accurate. If we feel confident about how we look and who we are, we generally feel more sexual. Forget the Viagra, lose the fat and find your voice.

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