

Welcome!



Elevate

Taking Your Relationship to the Next Level

EMPOWER YOURSELF



Why should you put
on your own oxygen
mask before you
help another?



EMPOWER YOURSELF



EMPOWER
YOURSELF



LAY THE
FOUNDATION



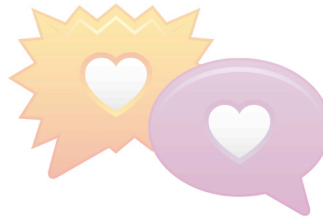
ENLIGHTEN



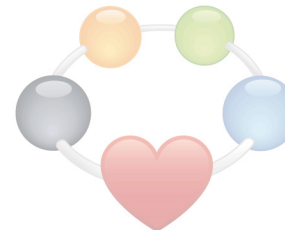
VALUE



ATTACH



TAME



ENGAGE

EMPOWER YOURSELF



Individual health and wellness include:

- ✓ Physical
- ✓ Spiritual
- ✓ Sexual
- ✓ Social/Emotional/Mental
- ✓ Relational

EMPOWER YOURSELF

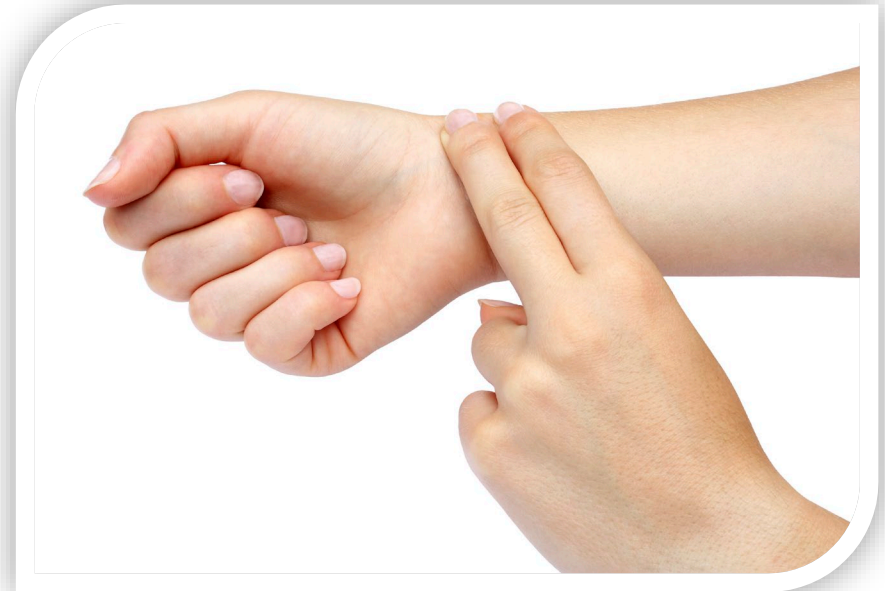
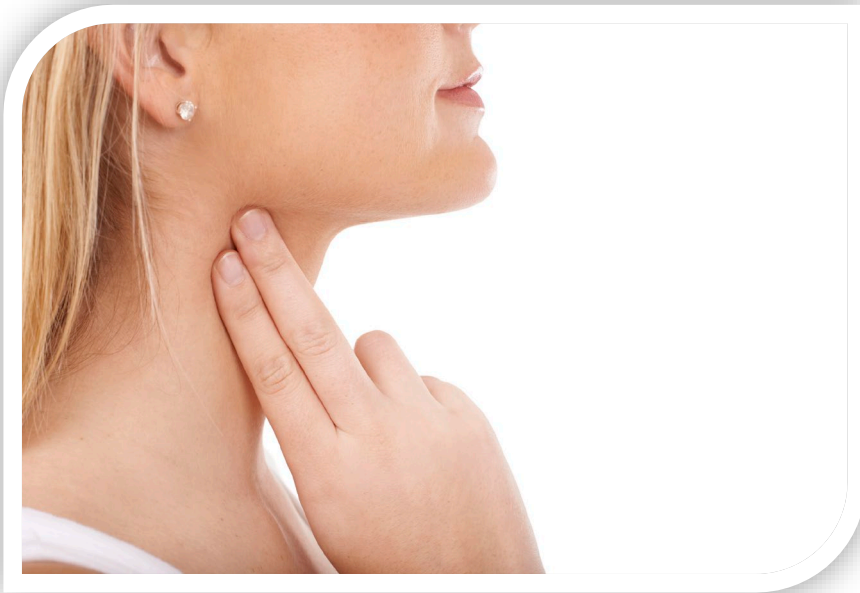
What stresses you out?



loss of a friend
death of a loved one
race-related stress
personal injury
change in sleeping habits
divorce
being fired from work
gaining a new family member
change in health or behavior of family member
change in living conditions
death of a close friend
change in church activities
change in working hours
military deployment
marriage
change in eating habits
illness
change in living conditions
change in health or behavior of family member
sexual difficulties
no health insurance
relationship break-up
can't find a job
change in finances
sick children
detention in jail
losing health benefits
change in eating habits
finding and paying for childcare
not having enough money to pay bills
detention of loved one in jail
chronic illness
parenting
changing personal habits
finding transportation
caring for elderly parents
feeling unsafe in neighborhood due to crime

EMPOWER YOURSELF

Take Your Pulse



EMPOWER YOURSELF

Stress effects your relationship



How do you
feel when
you don't
get enough
sleep or are
hungry?

What kind
of partner
are you
when you
feel that
way?

EMPOWER YOURSELF

Signs of Stress



**How do you
know that
you are
stressed?**





Signs of Stress



We know that we have to fill a car's gas tank before the gauge is on empty. The gas gauge is a signal that it's time to stop and get more fuel. As well, when cars hit potholes or curbs, tires get out of alignment and the car has trouble driving straight. A shaky wheel is a signal that alignment is needed. When oil is left unchanged for a long time, it causes other parts of the car to not work and break down. Odd noises under the hood, trouble starting the car, and sometimes smoke are signals that maintenance is needed.

Just like a car, our bodies also signal when we need to take care of ourselves. These signals are sometimes called "stress signals." We sometimes experience physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral signs.

What are some things that happen to you when you are stressed?

Physical

- ☐ Headache
- ☐ Body aches
- ☐ Heart pounds and breathe fast
- ☐ Upset stomach
- ☐ Feel very tired
- ☐ Not hungry
- ☐ Want to eat all the time
- ☐ Muscles tighten up

Emotional/Mental

- ☐ Worry something bad will happen
- ☐ Feel helpless or overwhelmed
- ☐ Feel frustrated
- ☐ Become moody or grouchy
- ☐ Cannot concentrate
- ☐ Think people are disappointed in you
- ☐ Have trouble remembering things
- ☐ Get nervous and can't relax

Other "stress signals" you experience:

What are some ways your partner and your partner's body responds to stress?

Feeling stressed is not a bad thing. In fact, sometimes it can push us to do well or do something positive. But, sometimes how we respond to stress can harm us and could hurt others whom we care about. When we feel stressed, the first step in handling our stress is to understand how it makes us feel. Help those you care about, and who care about you, understand your stress signals.

When you start noticing your stress signals use healthy coping strategies to make yourself healthier.

When you are healthy, your relationship with others will be healthier!

EMPOWER YOURSELF

How do you manage stress?



Breathe





Managing Stress



When it comes to stress, sometimes we need to take care of ourselves before we can care for others. How we take care of ourselves and react to stress is important. There are many ways to cope with stress. Some are healthy and some are not.

What are some ways that you deal with stress?

HEALTHY

- ☐ Go for a walk or exercising
- ☐ Sit quietly and breathe
- ☐ Read a relaxing book
- ☐ Listen to music
- ☐ Do a favorite hobby
- ☐ Eat just enough healthy food
- ☐ Pray or go to religious services
- ☐ Use humor, share a laugh, watch a funny movie
- ☐ Get enough sleep at night
- ☐ Seek help from a professional
- ☐ Talk to your partner or a close friend
- ☐ Write your concerns down in a journal
- ☐ Think positive thoughts
- ☐ Look for the good in your life

UNHEALTHY

- ☐ Yell, shout, scream, or curse
- ☐ Dwell on things that make you angry
- ☐ Smoke
- ☐ Drink
- ☐ Use drugs
- ☐ Hurt yourself or others
- ☐ Eat unhealthy food
- ☐ Eat too much or too little
- ☐ Sleep too much or too little
- ☐ Buy things you do not really need
- ☐ Avoid being with or talking to others
- ☐ Complain a lot to others
- ☐ Take things out on other people
- ☐ Destroy or damage things

List other healthy coping strategies you use:

List other unhealthy coping strategies you use:

Make an Action Plan:

How can you use more healthy coping strategies the next time you feel stressed?

What do you need to help you cope with stress?

Who can you turn to for help when you are stressed?

When we are healthy, our relationships with others are healthier!

EMPOWER YOURSELF

Mindfulness Practice: Partner Connection

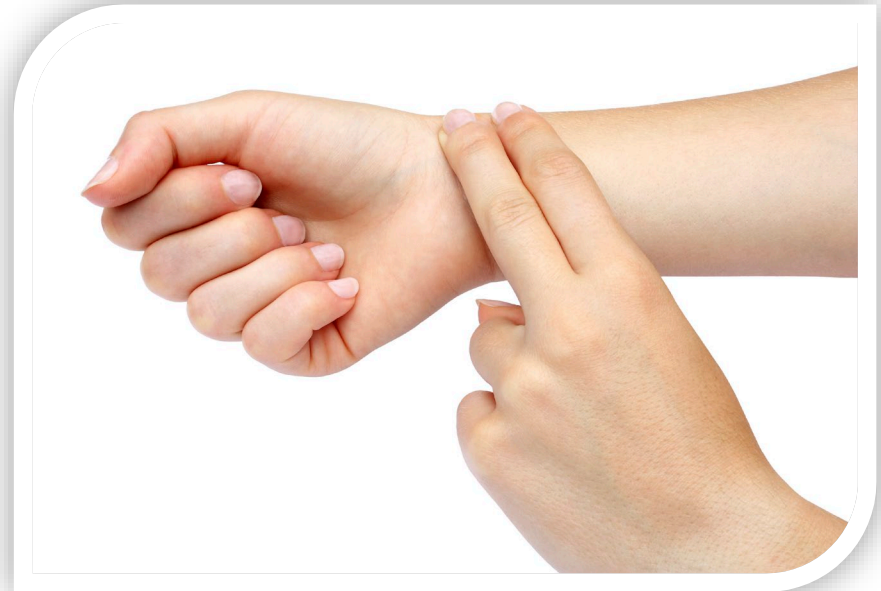
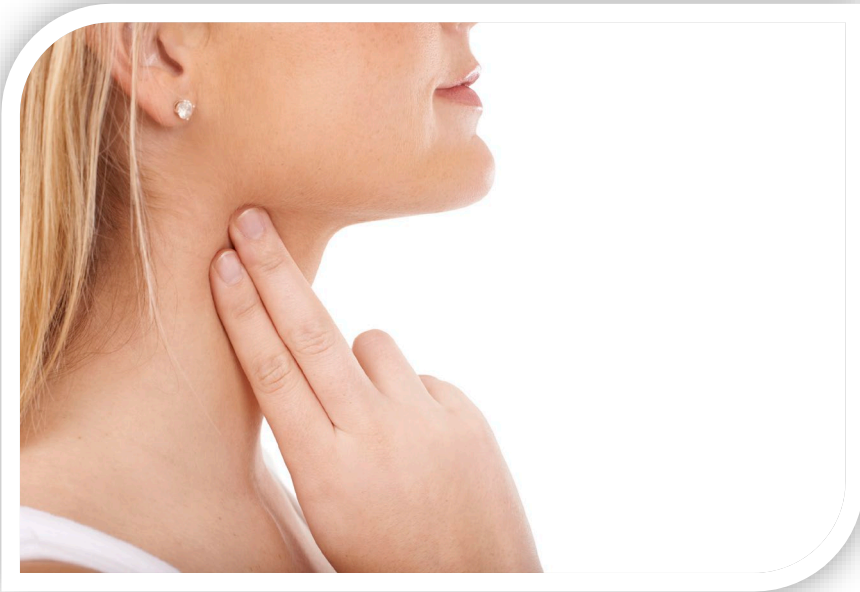


Think of a memory that
is full of joy or gratitude
towards your partner.



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Take Your Pulse



Heart-Brain Connection



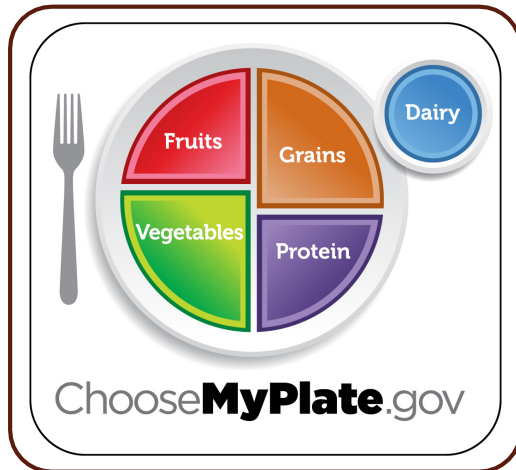
	Pulse (15 seconds) x 4 = Heart Rate	Emotional State/Mood
Ex.	Pulse <u>20</u> x 4 = <u>80</u>	<i>happy</i>
1	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
2	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
3	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
4	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
5	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
6	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	
7	Pulse _____ x 4 = _____	

Pulse	x4	Pulse	x4	Pulse	x4
15	60	19	76	23	92
16	64	20	80	24	96
17	68	21	84	25	100
18	72	22	88	26	104

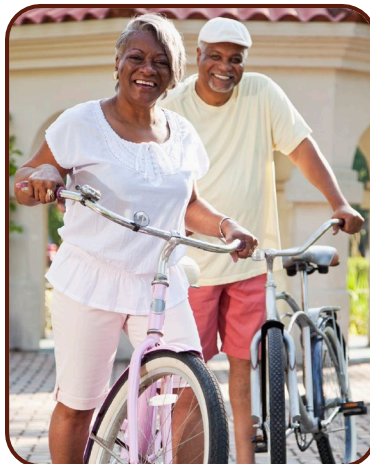
EMPOWER YOURSELF



Healthy
Eating



Regular
Exercise



Regular
Sleep



Quiet
Time





EMPOWER YOURSELF



HEALTHY LIVING, HEALTHY COUPLES

Build a healthy plate

Before you eat, think about what goes on your plate or in your cup or bowl. Foods like vegetables, fruits, whole grains, low-fat dairy products, and lean protein foods contain the nutrients you need without too many calories. Try some of these options.

- Make half your plate fruits and vegetables.
- Switch to skim or 1% milk.
- Make at least half your grains whole.
- Vary your protein food choices.
- Keep your food safe to eat – learn more at www.FoodSafety.gov.

Cut back on foods high in solid fats, added sugars, and salt

Many people eat foods with too much solid fats, added sugars, and salt (sodium). Added sugars and fats load foods with extra calories you don't need. Too much sodium may increase your blood pressure.

- Choose foods and drinks with little or no added sugars.
- Look out for salt (sodium) in foods you buy - it all adds up.
- Eat fewer foods that are high in solid fats.

Eat the right amount of calories for you

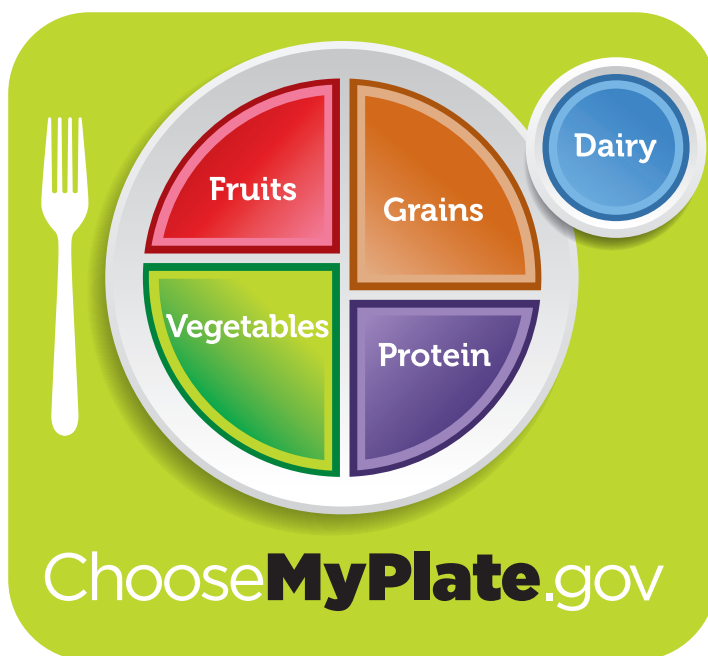
Everyone has a personal calorie limit. Staying within yours can help you get to or maintain a healthy weight. People who are successful at managing their weight have found ways to keep track of how much they eat in a day, even if they don't count every calorie.

- Enjoy your food, but eat less.
- Cook more often at home, where you are in control of what's in your food.
- When eating out, choose lower calorie menu options.
- Write down what you eat to keep track of how much you eat.
- If you drink alcoholic beverages, do so sensibly - limit to 1 drink a day for women or to 2 drinks a day for men.

Be physically active your way

Pick activities that you like and start by doing what you can, at least 10 minutes at a time. Every bit adds up, and the health benefits increase as you spend more time being active.

Visit www.choosemyplate.gov
for more resources and tips
for living healthy!



Source: USDA Dietary Guidelines Brochure – Choose My Plate



EMPOWER YOURSELF



Caring for Yourself to Care for Others

Taking care of yourself makes it easier to care, share, and connect with your partner and your family. Individual wellness is more than not being sick. Wellness involves making choices about eating right, exercising often, thinking positive thoughts, and sharing intimacy.

Healthy Eating

In order to properly nourish your body, feel good, and have the energy to love your partner well, it is important to make healthy food choices.

Consider these tips to make healthier choices about what you put into your body:

- Increase intake of fruits and vegetables (especially dark green and orange colored) each day.
- Try to increase the amount of whole grains you eat – choose whole grain breads and pastas instead of white.
- Keep food safe – keep meat and dairy properly refrigerated. Make sure to cook meat until it has reached the right temperature.
- Choose a diet that is low in saturated fat and cholesterol and limit the overall fat that you eat. Choose low-fat options.
- Decrease your intake of foods that have a lot of sugar and salt in them. Choose foods labeled “no added sugar” or “low sodium” or ones that do not list sugar as one of the first 3 ingredients.



Physical Activity

Move your body! Adding physical activity to your daily routine not only reduces health problems, but also improves your mental health and relationships.

These guidelines can help you add more physical activity into your day:

- Exercise with a partner so that you can support and motivate each other.
- Doctors recommend 30 minutes of moderate activity 5 days per week. Try walking at a brisk pace, housework, pushing a lawnmower, or dancing.
- Do at least 10 minutes of exercise at a time. Include some aerobic exercise that makes your heart beat faster and also strength building exercises.



Regulating Your Emotions

Regulating your emotions involves controlling how you feel and how you react to stressful situations. Sometimes it seems we have no control over how we feel, but it is possible to manage emotions and how we express them.

Try these tips:

- Humor – learning to be lighthearted in the midst of highly emotional times can help ease the tension and can help you to calm down when necessary.
- Positive self-talk – learn to be the positive voice inside of your head instead of the negative one. For example, instead of saying “Oh, I can’t believe I did that” try saying, “I know I can do better next time.”
- Think logically about the meaning behind the emotion – ask yourself – Why am I feeling like this? Where is this coming from? How would I like to react?
- Be willing to change. Learning to compromise can solve a lot of problems.



Sexual Health and Intimacy

Did you know most people report that the quality of their sexual relationship with their partner is more important than how much they have sex? Sexual satisfaction is clearly linked to the physical and emotional wellness of each partner.

In order to have a healthy sexual relationship as a couple, there are key things to focus on:

- Openness about sexual desires. This requires knowing yourself and your wants enough to talk freely about them with your partner.
- Set the mood early. Foreplay happens way before you make it to the bedroom; being kind and having fun sets a better mood for romance.
- Sharing power. A healthy balance of influence in the relationship is crucial for creating intimacy. Think about ways that you and your partner can share.
- Medical issues. Side effects of some medications can impact sexual desire. Talk with your doctor about any possible side effects that may occur and be patient with your partner.
- Emotional issues. There are countless other influences that affect your sexual relationship, including sexual history and mental health. Learn to be mindful about how these things might be affecting your sexual relationship.

Think Positive!

Learning to think positively about life can have dramatic effects on your well-being and on your relationships with others. Optimism involves being hopeful and confident about the future and the successful outcome of a situation. It also involves viewing obstacles as opportunities to learn and grow.

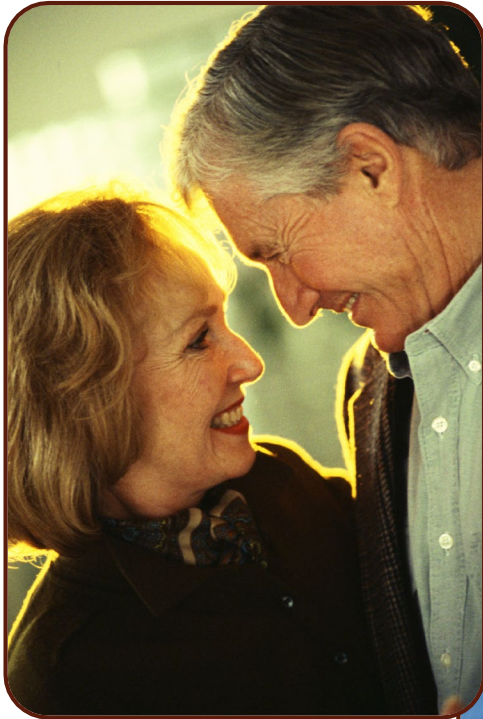
EMPOWER YOURSELF

Cultivate Your Spiritual Wellness



EMPOWER YOURSELF

Pay Attention to Sexual Health





Tips for a healthier sex life with your partner



Sex and intimacy are vital to your relationship. Read below to find out more about keeping the sexual connection healthy.

Benefits from sharing a healthy sex life with your partner:

- Ease tension and stress
- Release “feel good” chemicals called endorphins
- Release “bonding hormones” called Vasopressin and Oxytocin
- Slow down aging
- Slow the loss of vaginal lubrication
- Decrease prostate issues

The problem is that fitting long-term intimacy, arousal, and sexuality in a relationship is difficult.

- Be aware! There are certain times during most long-term relationships when couples are at a high risk for losing their sexual bond: before or after the birth of a child, when adolescents are in the home, when someone is in poor health, and during menopause.
- Passionate sex often only lasts from 6 months to 2 years and may fizzle out before you're even married. Passion tends to come and go throughout a long-term relationship. During the sexual lulls, extra effort is needed to connect with your partner. Hugging, kissing, and other forms of physical touch can enhance intimacy.
- Don't let “Hollywood Sex” that shows super stars aroused before any contact and having multiple and mutual orgasms intimidate you! It's not reality! Real couples don't just walk around the house aroused and ready for sex. Real couples have kids, work, etc.
- MOST sexual encounters are NOT spontaneous. Surprised? Your best bet for having a sexual encounter is to *plan it*. Only about 1 out of 20 sexual encounters occur when both partners are aroused, without any planning, and are orgasmic for both. The stars only align about once a month. Enjoy when they do and plan for the rest of the time.
- Even happy, satisfied couples will have ‘not so satisfying’ sex sometimes. Sex is about more than performance or orgasms. About 5 to 15% of the time a sexual encounter will be a dud!
- Don't assume you know what your partner likes. Ask your partner, “What do you like?” The answer may surprise you! Just as people change over time, their preferences can too.



- You deserve to have sexuality and intimacy in your relationship. Don't let your marriage turn into an old shoe! New and different activities can help lead to sexual desire.
- Make the effort to go on dates with your partner, get away, or try something new together. Work together to figure out what bridges each other to desire. Couples who feel more emotionally connected have more frequent sex.
- Want to improve your sex life (especially if you are over 40)? Being physically healthy is a big part of a healthy sex life. For example, did you know that belly fat blocks testosterone; the hormone responsible for sex drive? Getting healthy will give you more energy for everything, including sex. Start exercising, get good sleep, eat well, etc.
- Sex is not about intercourse, but about the flow of eroticism. Sometimes it won't flow to intercourse, and many couples struggle with an all or nothing approach. Try to think of sex as a way to share pleasure and work on becoming comfortable with erotic non-intercourse.

Like driving a car, try imagining shifting from 1st to 5th gear – the car would choke. Don't focus on getting to 5th gear. Instead, try enjoying 1st gear. If it progresses to 2nd gear, enjoy that too. Often the gears naturally progress and enjoy each gear in the process.

1st Gear of Connection: Affectionate Touch is all about getting connected with your partner.

- Hand-holding, hugging, kissing
- Clothes on

2nd Gear of Connection: Sensual Touch is all about giving and being receptive to non-genital touch.

- Warmth
- Body massages, cuddling, caressing, hugging, kissing

3rd Gear of Connection: Playful Touch includes a mix of non-genital touching and genital pleasuring.

- Showering together
- Erotic games
- Dancing (erotic or romantic)

4th Gear of Connection: Erotic Touch becomes more physically arousing.

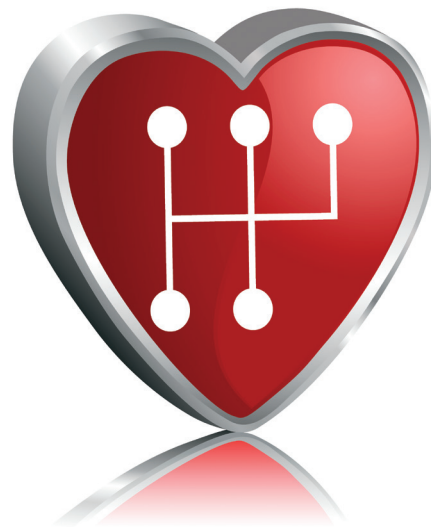
- Manual, oral, rubbing, vibrator
- Couples younger than 45 or 50 may have more trouble with erotic touch
- Oral sex – viewed as more erotic by older couples (i.e. 55 year olds)

5th Gear of Connection: Intercourse

- Most transition when they can (3rd gear). Wait and transition to sexual intercourse when you should (4th gear)
- Waiting to transition to a higher level of arousal is especially helpful for ensuring the bodies are "ready" for intercourse

Although there are times you may not reach 5th gear, taking the pressure off and focusing instead on each other's enjoyment builds a positive connection that can last.

***A healthy sexual relationship is an important part of a healthy partnership.
You get out of it what you put into it!!!***



Prepared by Scott Ketrang, Sandy Morrison, and Vanessa Finnegan from Auburn University.
For more information: McCarthy, B., & McCarthy, E. (2014). *Rekindling desire* (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.

EMPOWER YOURSELF

Support Your Emotional/Social/Mental Health



- ✓ Identify strengths in yourself and your partner.
- ✓ Notice and appreciate the good in your life.





My (and My Partner's) Strengths



When we hear the word “strengths,” we often think of talents like being athletic, singing, being artistic, or playing a musical instrument. But strengths can also refer to unique qualities, such as kindness, fairness, curiosity, and being a good parent or partner.

Read through the statements below. Mark those that describe you and your partner.

	My Strength	Partner's Strength
1. I am curious about the world.		
2. I enjoy learning new things.		
3. I like to think of new ways to do things.		
4. No matter what the social situation, I am able to fit in.		
5. I am able to look at things and see the big picture.		
6. I have taken frequent stands in the face of strong opposition.		
7. I finish what I start.		
8. I keep my promises.		
9. I have voluntarily helped a friend/neighbor in the last month.		
10. I have people in my life who are as concerned about my feelings and well-being as they do about their own.		
11. I avoid sarcasm and put-downs.		
12. I treat all people equally regardless of who they might be.		
13. I often get people to do things together without nagging.		
14. I control my emotions.		
15. I do not engage in activities that could put me in danger.		
16. I change the subject when people pay me a compliment.		
17. I often say thank you, even for little things.		
18. I look for positives even when things are not going well.		
19. My life has a strong purpose.		
20. I don't hold grudges.		

What are some of your other strengths that are not listed?

How can you use your strengths to help strengthen your couple relationship?

Think about some items you did not mark as strengths for you or your partner. How can you and your partner work together to develop that into a strength?

Use your strengths to improve your health and the health of your relationship.



What Went Well?



When we feel a lot of stress, it can seem like we have very little control over our lives. We tend to be negative and wonder what bad thing will happen next. If we try looking for the good instead, and give ourselves credit for having a positive influence, we will feel more in control and find better ways to solve problems.

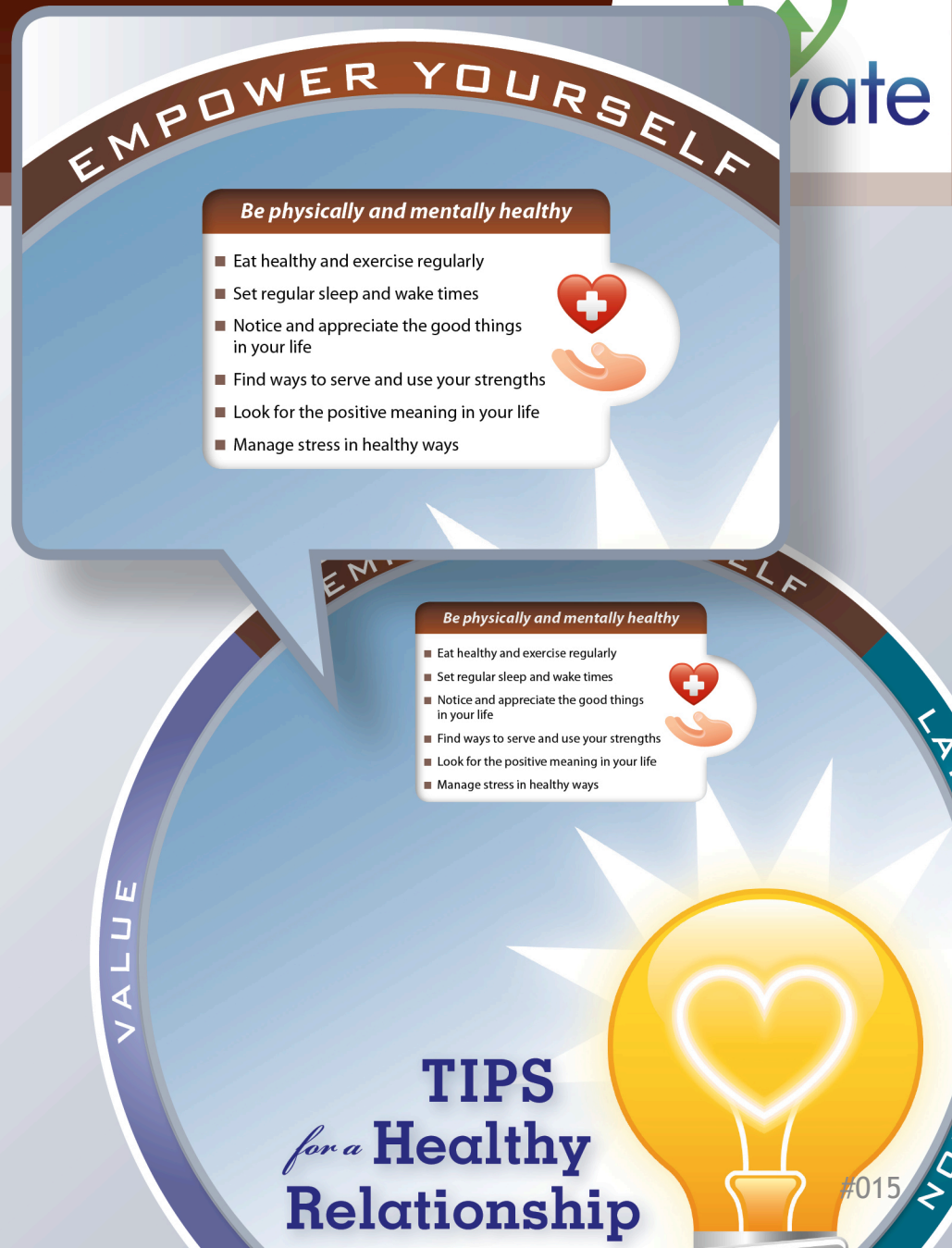
Seeing the many good things you do for yourself and others every day is one way to be positive and in control. Before you go to sleep each night, write down two things that went well that day. Next, ask yourself – “How did I make this happen?”

	What went well?	How did I make this happen?
Sunday		
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		

***Learning to think positively about life can help you
and your relationship with others.***

Action Plan

- ✓ What are ways that you empower yourself?
- ✓ What is one new thing you plan to try?



Tips For a Healthy Relationship



EMPOWER YOURSELF—Individual health impacts the health of couple relationships. Taking care of yourself first can help improve the wellness of your relationship. Below are some ways that you can *Care for Self* and help your relationship:

- Eat healthy and exercise regularly.
- Set regular sleep and wake times for yourself.
- Notice and appreciate the small, good things in your life to help you find greater happiness and satisfaction.
- Find ways to use your strengths to serve your community.
- Look for the positive meaning in your life.
- Learn to manage stress in more healthy, effective ways.



LAY THE FOUNDATION—Are you making deliberate and conscious decisions about your relationships? It is important to be intentional when establishing and nurturing healthy relationships. Here are some ways to show how you *Choose* to strengthen your relationship:

- Make the decision to enter into a relationship rather than sliding into one.
- Commit and provide effort in the relationship.
- Focus on each other's strengths, and what each of you brings to the relationship.
- Avoid thoughts and behaviors that could potentially be hurtful to one another.
- Find positive and effective ways to grow your relationship.
- Envision and set goals for a healthy future together.



ENLIGHTEN—How well do you know your partner? Sharing and developing an understanding with your partner creates stability and increases awareness of your partner and the relationship. Here are some ways you can get to *Know* your partner better:

- Ask about your partner's life, thoughts, and feelings to get to know them better.
- Be sensitive to your partner's worries and needs.
- Think back on positive experiences you have had together.
- Express sincere interest in what is happening in your partner's life.
- See situations through your partner's eyes to gain a better understanding of how they look at things.
- Discuss what you expect in a relationship with one another.



VALUE—Keeping a relationship healthy is the responsibility of each person in that relationship. What do you do to show support, affection, and respect for your partner? Here are some ways to show that you *Care* for your partner:

- Show respect by expressing caring actions towards your partner instead of crabby reactions when he or she has had a stressful day.
- When communicating, be open and listen to your partner.
- Focus on the good in your partner.
- Accept and value the differences that you and your partner share.
- Give love in the way your partner likes to be loved.
- Show appreciation as a way to make a deposit in your relationship account.
- To maintain a strong relationship, make time for togetherness and moments of connection.

My Action Plan



What will you do to ELEVATE your love?

Empower Yourself

Lay the Foundation

Enlighten
