

MHC

MAKING HAPPY COUPLES

IS IT RELATIONSHIP
ANXIETY OR YOUR
GUT TELLING YOU
SOMETHING?

TRYING TO
CONCEIVE
TIPS FOR
COUPLES

THERAPIST
JORDAN DANN
SHARES 5
CONFLICT
RESOLUTION
TECHNIQUES

VOL
16

WHY DON'T WE

Dream together?

MEET ALI & JOSH / @THEFICOUPLE



EDITORS' NOTE

What Spain Knows About Slowing Down

Welcome to Volume 16: The Deep Breath Issue.

In Spain there's a word English doesn't really have: **sobremesa**. It's the time you spend at the table after the meal is over. Plates empty, coffee cold, and nobody in a hurry to leave.

You see it everywhere here. Shops close in the afternoon so people can eat together and rest. Couples stroll through the plaza at night with nowhere to be.

A quick coffee lasts two hours. Because a good life isn't measured by how much you have. It's measured by how much time you have, and who you spend it with.

Most of us live the opposite way. We hold our breath chasing the next thing and promise ourselves we'll slow down once we get there. That's why this is The Deep Breath Issue.



In Spain, quality of
life isn't measured
in money.
It's measured in
time.

You'll meet Ali and Josh Lupo, who went from \$100,000 in debt to financial freedom and realized what they wanted most was breakfast together on a Tuesday. (They'd fit right in here.) Plus Michael J. Fox and Tracy Pollan, a date with no phones and no plans, and a cover story on keeping things fun while trying for a baby.

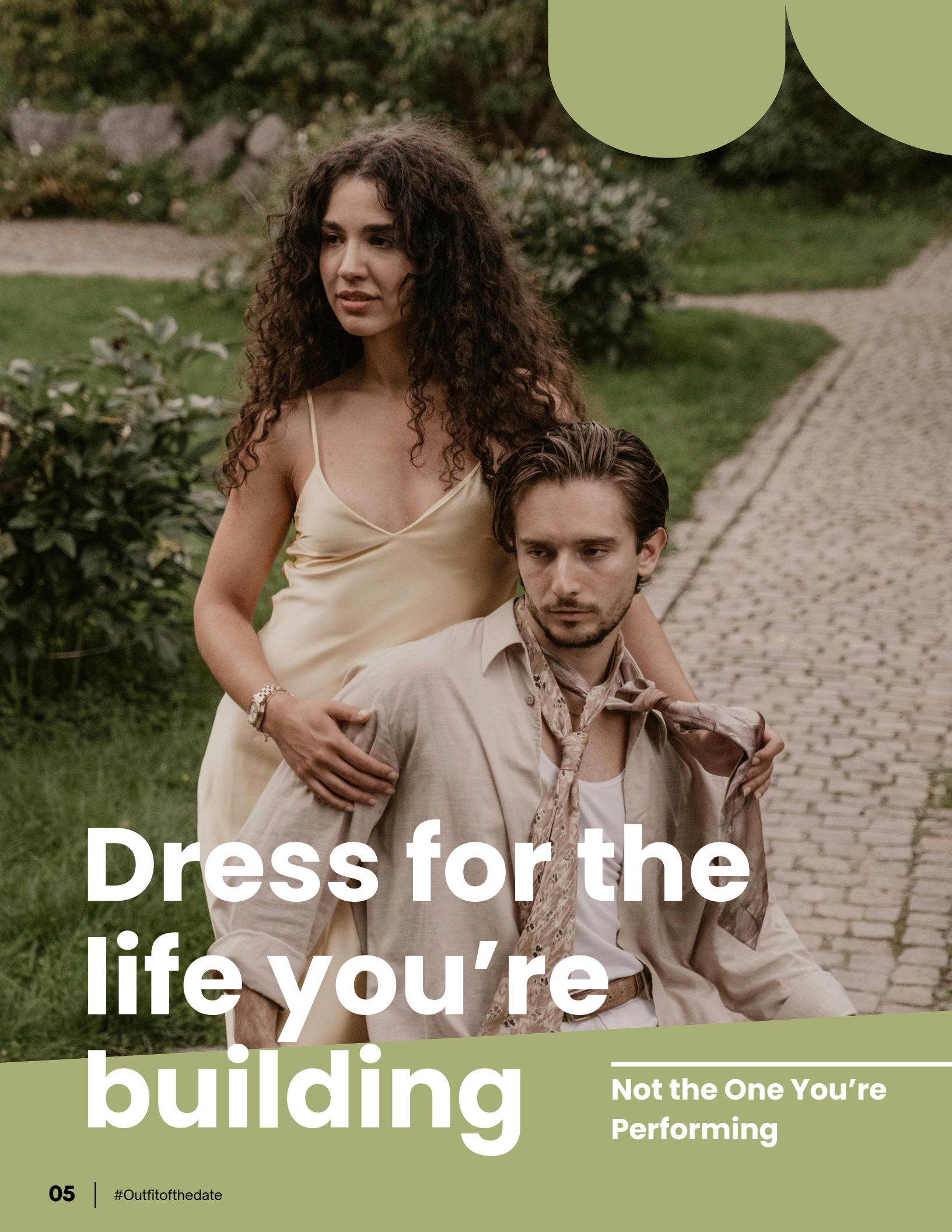
So this month, borrow a little of Spain's rhythm. Take the long lunch. Stay at the table after dinner. Take the nap. The best part of the life you're building might already be sitting across from you.

With love...
Daniel & Daniella



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Dress for the life you're building

Not the One You're
Performing



Your his & hers guide to clothes that look great, feel great, and survive an actual Saturday.

Picture it: a pumpkin patch on a crisp fall afternoon. A couple in coordinated cream knits and brand-new suede boots spends twenty minutes getting the perfect photo... and zero minutes picking a pumpkin. She's limping. He's freezing. The photo? Gorgeous.

We've all been that couple at least once. The outfit you can't sit down in. The shoes that were "fine" until minute eleven. The look that was built for the feed, not for the day.



This season, we're proposing something radical: dressing for the life you actually live together (and the one you're building), not the one you're performing. Still stylish. Still flirty. Just a lot more comfortable.

The best outfit is the one you forget you're wearing because you're too busy having fun.

Quick Check: Are You Dressed for the Feed?

If you answer yes to two or more, this guide is for you:

- You own something you've worn exactly once, in exactly one photo.
- You've said "I'll just stand" at a restaurant because of your pants.
- Your "good shoes" live in a box and come with a warning.
- You've changed outfits because of the lighting, not the weather.



Look 1: The Sunday Farmers Market & Brunch

Long, lazy, lots of walking, and at least one pastry. You want to look put-together without looking like you tried too hard (even if you did).

For her:

Ribcage Straight Ankle Jeans

High-rise, straight-leg, and flattering on nearly everyone. Dresses up with a nice knit, dresses down with a tee, and survives a second croissant.

Cashmere Crewneck Sweater

Soft, warm, and in a dozen colors. The kind of sweater your partner will “borrow” and never return. Consider it a compliment.

Sneakers

Clean, minimal, and made for walking the market end to end. Cute enough for brunch, comfy enough for the stroll home.



Mongolian
Cashmere Crewneck
Sweater by Quince

Campo Sneakers by Veja

Ribcage Straight Ankle
Jeans by Levi's

For him:

501 Original Fit

The classic for a reason. Straight, easy, and they only get better the more you live in them.

Better Sweater ¼-Zip Fleece

Cozy without being sloppy. It says “I’m relaxed” and “I own a nice mug” at the same time.

Boston Suede Clogs

The comfort shoe that became cool. Slip them on, walk all day, look effortlessly weekend.



Better Sweater ¼-Zip Fleece by Patagonia

Boston Suede Clogs by Birkenstock

501 by Levi's

Look 2: The Night In (Yes, It Deserves an Outfit)

Here's a secret the happiest couples know: you don't save your best self for strangers. Every so often, get dressed for each other at home. Not a gown. Not a tux. Just a step up from the sweatpants with the mystery stain.

For her:



GISELE LONG PJ SET BY EBERJEY

Buttery soft, a little bit elegant, and flirty in the most effortless way. It feels like loungewear and reads like a statement.

001

For him



PONTO PERFORMANCE JOGGERS BY VUORI

Soft, tailored, and a serious upgrade from the college hoodie era. Add a fitted tee and you look like a man who knows where the good wine glasses are.

002

Our tip

Light a candle, put on a playlist, and once the dishes are done, bring out Why Not? for the rest of the evening. You're dressed for it.



**Your partner is a
better audience
than any feed.
Dress up for them
once in a while.**

Look 3: The “Future Us” Piece

Dressing for the life you’re building is different from dressing to perform. Aspirational clothes are a promise to yourself: the trip you’re saving for, the new job, the version of you you’re growing into. Allow yourselves one special piece each.

For her:

Parke Blazer by J.Crew

A well-cut blazer that works over jeans, over a dress, or for that big meeting. The “I’ve got this” piece every wardrobe deserves.

For him:

Bedale Wax Jacket by Barbour

An heirloom-in-the-making for the weekend trips and countryside escapes you keep talking about. It only gets better with age. So do you two.

Parke Blazer by
J.Crew



Bedale Wax
Jacket by
Barbour



Replica Lazy Sunday
Morning by Maison
Margiela

Replica By the
Fireplace by Maison
Margiela



The Finishing Touch: Scent for Real Life

These two come from the same collection, so you can be a matching couple without the matching outfits.

For her:

Replica Lazy Sunday Morning

Clean sheets, soft musk, and white florals. It smells exactly like a slow weekend morning with nowhere to be.

For him:

Replica By the Fireplace

Warm chestnut, vanilla, and a little smokiness. Cozy, grown-up, and impossible not to lean in closer to.

the decompression date

The date for couples whose calendars have calendars. Three simple rules, zero reservations, and the most relaxed you've felt in months.

Let's be honest: most of our dates lately have had more logistics than a small airline. Reservations, sitters, parking, photos. Somewhere in there, we were supposed to relax. So we tried a date with no phones, no plans, and no agenda. It might be the best date we've had all year.

Her take: I realized I hadn't looked at his face for more than four seconds, without a screen in between, in weeks.

His take: The fantasy football league survived without me. Barely.

The Three Rules

No phones. In a drawer, at home. (Checking "just the weather" counts as cheating.) In their place: paper cards that give your hands something to do and your conversation somewhere to go.

No plans. Pick a starting point, like a park, a beach, or a market. That's it. Go where your feet and appetite take you.

No agenda. If it belongs on a to-do list, it doesn't belong on this date.

Before you go: each of you scribbles everything buzzing in your head on scraps of paper and drops them in a Worry Jar. They'll be waiting when you get back. It works embarrassingly well.



We didn't need a better restaurant. We needed a slower afternoon.



How the day unfolds

Day out

Talk For Hours and **Laugh Together**.

1. Wander. Follow whatever catches your eye. Game break: slip a few **Talk For Hours** cards in your pocket and draw one at every crosswalk. You can't cross until you've both answered.

2. Graze. Eat wherever looks good, no reviews allowed. Then break out **Laugh Together** at the table. Our house rule: the loser plans the next Decompression Date.

3. Do nothing (on purpose). Find a bench, hold hands, and let the silence happen. It's the hardest part, and the best.

Night in

Spice it up or **Why not?.**
No chargers required,

4. Slow evening in. Cook something easy and keep the phones in the drawer. Then start with the mild deck of **Spice It Up** and let the night build from there.

Feeling adventurous? Roll out the **Why Not?** board and let the game make the decisions.



Decompression date bingo

- ☐ Discover a place you've never noticed before
- ☐ Let a green light pass because you were still answering a card
- ☐ Eat somewhere without checking a single review
- ☐ Sit in comfortable silence for five full minutes
- ☐ Forget, for at least an hour, what time it is

**All five?
Decompression
achieved. You may
now return to society
(gradually).**



Short on time? Do the home version: phones in the drawer from dinner to bedtime, candles on, and see where the night goes.

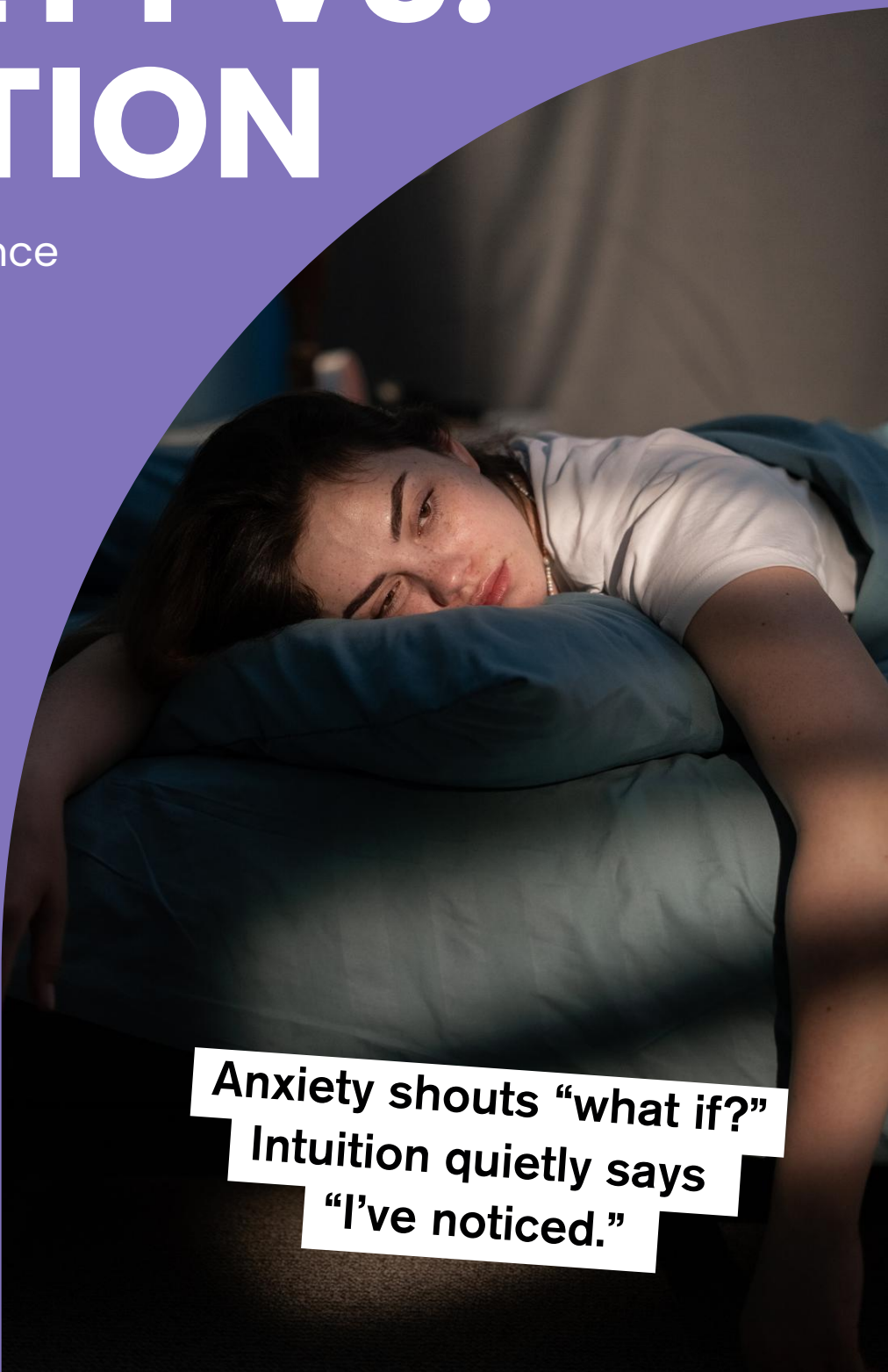
RELATIONSHIP ANXIETY VS. INTUITION

How to Tell the Difference

Is it a red flag or just your brain doing that thing again? A practical (and surprisingly fun) guide to reading your own gut.

He took three hours to text back. She said “I’m fine” with a period. And here you are at 1 a.m., replaying a single facial expression like it’s evidence in a courtroom drama. Is this your intuition protecting you, or your anxiety “protecting” you from something that isn’t happening?

Anxiety is your brain’s smoke alarm: sometimes it’s a real fire, often it’s just someone making toast. Intuition is a quiet, observant friend who keeps pointing at the same thing until you look. They feel similar, but they behave very differently.

A woman with dark hair is lying in bed, propped up on her elbow, looking thoughtfully at the camera. She is wearing a white t-shirt and a necklace. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Anxiety shouts “what if?”
Intuition quietly says
“I’ve noticed.”**



The tells

- **Volume:** anxiety is loud and urgent. Intuition is calm and just doesn't go away.
- **Evidence:** anxiety runs on "what ifs" and one-off moments. Intuition runs on patterns you've seen more than once.
- **Subject:** anxiety is about you ("Am I enough?"). Intuition is about the situation ("Their actions don't match their words.")
- **Reassurance:** if a hug makes it disappear, it's probably anxiety. If only changed behavior would fix it, listen closer.



Quick Quiz: Which One Is It?

- They forgot to say "love you" one time. Anxiety. One moment, no pattern: that's toast.
- For months, weekend plans are vague and questions make them defensive. Intuition. That's a pattern worth a calm talk.
- Things are going great, so something bad must be coming. Anxiety. Happiness is allowed to just be happiness.
- You feel smaller and more careful around them than you used to. Intuition. How you feel over time is real data.

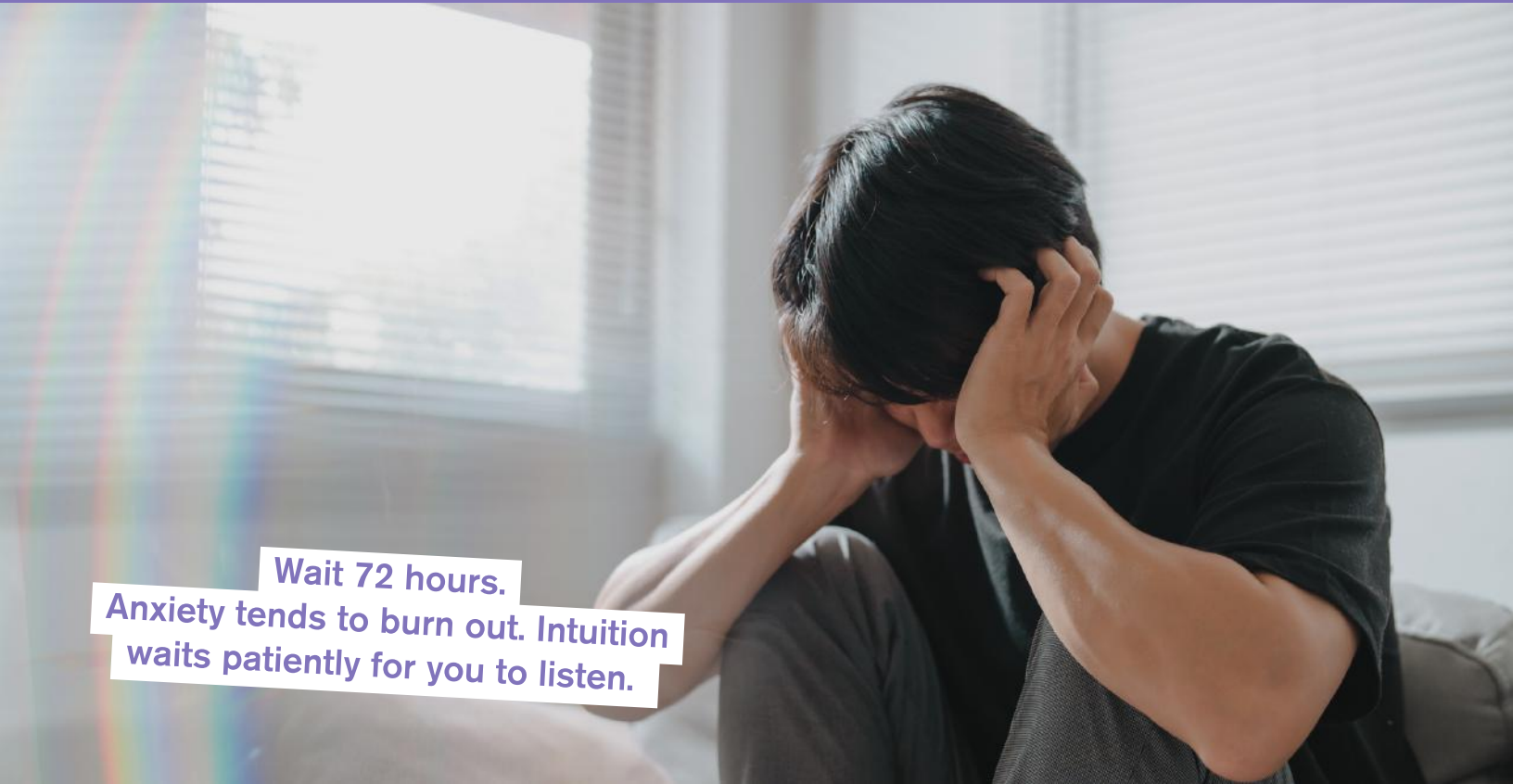
Three Tools for Next Time

The 72-Hour Rule. Wait three days before acting on a big feeling. Anxiety usually burns out. If it's still there, calm as ever, it's earned a conversation.

The Receipt Check. Two columns: "What actually happened" and "Stories I'm telling myself." If the second is a novel, you know who's talking.

The Name-It Trick. Say "This is my anxiety talking." Bonus points for a nickname. We know someone who calls hers "Karen from Accounting."

Not sure? Say it out loud: *"I can't tell if this is my anxiety or something real, and I trust you enough to ask. Can I tell you what's on my mind?"*



Wait 72 hours.
Anxiety tends to burn out. Intuition waits patiently for you to listen.

Good to know

If you feel afraid of your partner, controlled, or unsafe, that's not anxiety. **It's intuition doing its most important job. Reach out to someone you trust or the National Domestic Violence Hotline ([thehotline.org](https://www.thehotline.org)).**

So next time the text comes three hours late, check your receipts, take a breath, and let Karen from Accounting take the night off.

WHY DON'T WE Dream together



MEET ALI & JOSH

ALI & JOSH LUPO OF THE FI COUPLE ON TURNING MONEY PRESSURE INTO A SHARED DREAM, AND WHY THE BEST THING MONEY CAN BUY IS TIME TOGETHER.

@THEFICOUPLE / @TRYDOLLARFI

RELATIONSHIP RECEIPT

TOGETHER: ALMOST 13 YEARS

MARRIED: 8 YEARS

CHILDREN: 1 DAUGHTER, ZOEY (3 YEARS OLD)

LOCATION: UPSTATE NEW YORK

PROFESSIONS: ENTREPRENEURS, REAL ESTATE INVESTORS, CONTENT CREATORS, AND FINANCIAL EDUCATORS

MOST LIKELY TO MAKE A SPONTANEOUS PURCHASE: ALI

MOST LIKELY TO CHECK THE BUDGET FIRST: JOSH

SHARED MONEY BELIEF: FINANCIAL FREEDOM IS THE BEST THING MONEY CAN BUY

MAIN FINANCIAL DISAGREEMENT: ENJOYING LIFE TODAY VS. SAVING AND INVESTING FOR TOMORROW

RELATIONSHIP IN ONE WORD: "TOGETHER"

----- TRUE LOVE
TOTAL:

INSTAGRAM: @THEFICOUPLE AND @TRYDOLLARFI



MAKING HAPPY COUPLES

Agree on the Destination, Not Every Decision

In 2017, Ali and Josh Lupo were social workers living paycheck to paycheck, newly married, and carrying more than \$100,000 in consumer debt. On paper, they had done everything "right": good schools, degrees, careers, hard work. But the life they were building didn't feel like theirs.

So one evening, after a particularly rough week, they sat in their driveway with a pen and a piece of paper and asked each other a simple question: what do we actually want our life to look like?

Five years later, they had paid off every dollar of that debt, built a multi-million-dollar real estate portfolio, and reached financial independence in their early 30s. Today they share what they've learned as The FI Couple, have launched a new financial freedom platform called Dollar FI, and spend their days doing the most ordinary, extraordinary thing of all: being present for their three-year-old daughter, Zoey.

But this isn't really a story about money. It's a story about two very different people (a spender and a saver, a "let's enjoy today" and a "let's build tomorrow") learning that they didn't need to agree on every decision. They just needed to agree on where they were going.

When you were newly married and facing six figures of debt, what did money feel like inside your relationship?

Despite the financial position we were in, money wasn't overly stressful, per se. But a lot of that was because we simply didn't talk about money, nor did we ever plan for the future. Our six figures of debt and inability to consistently pay bills felt like a weight sitting in the background of our relationship.

Money can create tension even in the strongest relationships. What helped you turn finances from a potential source of conflict into something you could work on as a team?

In time, our conversations around money stopped being about who was right. Instead, the conversation shifted to: "What are we trying to accomplish together?"

If one of us wants to spend \$500 and the other wants to invest it, it's easy for the conversation to become spender versus saver.

But if we've already agreed that we want more freedom, more time together, or the ability to make a certain life change, we can ask a much better question: Which decision gets us closer to the life we said we wanted?

We don't have to agree on every financial decision. We need to agree on the destination.

You didn't just decide to save more. You completely rethought the way you wanted to live. Was there ever a point where one of you wanted to push harder while the other wanted to slow down and enjoy life?

Absolutely. Josh has historically been more comfortable delaying gratification and pushing toward the next milestone. Ali has often been better at reminding us that there needs to be a life happening while we're building the future.



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We've needed both perspectives. Financial independence can become another treadmill if you're not careful: you hit one number and suddenly decide you need another.

Eventually, we had to remember why we wanted the money in the first place. Today, we're less interested in maximizing every dollar and more interested in optimizing our life.



“We used to think financial independence would feel like reaching a certain number. What we’ve discovered is that it feels much more like having control over our calendar.”

You’ve talked about financial independence being less about having more money and more about having more choice, control, and autonomy. What does that freedom look like in your marriage?

It looks surprisingly ordinary, and that was honestly always the goal. Unlike what the media often portrays, financial freedom for us never meant a flashy lifestyle.

We have breakfast together on a Tuesday. We pick up our daughter and take her to the playground every single day. We plan vacations without first needing to ask an employer for permission. When family is in crisis, we can be there to support them without having to worry about our calendar.

We used to think financial independence would feel like reaching a certain number. What we’ve discovered is that it feels much more like having control over our calendar.

Your first real estate moves involved house hacking and unconventional choices about where and how you lived. What did those experiences teach you about doing things differently as a couple?

It taught us that building an unconventional life requires making unconventional decisions.

House hacking wasn’t glamorous, and neither was the high-mileage 2011 Toyota Corolla we drove. Living downstairs from our tenants in hundred-year-old properties that constantly needed maintenance certainly wasn’t the picture of adulthood we had imagined growing up.

But those choices dramatically changed our trajectory and will have positive ripple effects for decades. We learned to stop asking “Is this what everyone else is doing?” and start asking

“Does this move us closer to where we want to go?”

When you're both working toward a major goal, how do you make sure the relationship doesn't become just another project on the list?

We're still working on this one every single day, and it's definitely not easy.

When you're married, raising a child, running businesses, investing, and creating content together, it's incredibly easy for every conversation to become operational and transactional. Who's doing this? Did you answer that email? What time is that meeting? What's happening with this property?

We've had to remind ourselves that before we were business partners, investors, creators, or even parents, we were Ali and Josh. We fell in love long before we built any of this. Sometimes the healthiest thing we can do is stop talking about money, work, and goals, and simply enjoy the life we've worked so hard to build together.



Couples can have very different relationships with money based on how they grew up. How have your backgrounds influenced the way you approach spending, saving, risk, and security?

Our backgrounds have shaped us tremendously. Josh experienced significant instability growing up, including spending time in foster care and having his father absent for much of his childhood. That created a strong desire for security, and eventually an intense motivation to build a life where he could control his time and be present as a father.

Ali grew up in a far more stable household income-wise, but as a result, that conditioned her to be more conservative in her outlook and to think a lot smaller in the beginning than Josh.

One of the biggest things we've learned is that when couples argue about money, they're rarely arguing only about dollars. They're often talking about security, childhood, identity, fear, freedom, and what "enough" means to them.

Understanding why your partner feels a certain way about money can be much more productive than arguing about the number itself.

"When couples argue about money, they're rarely arguing only about dollars."



What's something you used to think you needed to be happy that you no longer care about?

There was a time when we both assumed financial progress would eventually look like nicer cars, a bigger house, expensive things, or other visible signs that we had "made it."

Today, we're much less interested in looking wealthy. We're interested in being free.

Ironically, the less we've cared about impressing other people, the easier it has become to build a life that impresses us.

If a couple reading this has very different financial goals, what conversation should they have before trying to create a shared plan?

If a couple reading this has very different financial goals, what conversation should they have before trying to create a shared plan?

Before talking about budgets, investments, debt strategies, or spreadsheets, we'd start with: "If money weren't the obstacle, what would we want our life to look like?"

Where would we live? How would we spend our time? Would we work differently? What experiences would we want to have? What would make each of us feel secure? What would we regret not doing?

Dream together first. This was the exact exercise that completely changed the trajectory of our life. Get clear about what you value most and what your version of a "rich life" actually looks like. Then figure out how you can work in tandem and use your money to build a life aligned with those values. Start with life. Then build the financial plan around it. Too many of us do the opposite.

After everything you've built together, what does a "rich life" mean to Ali and Josh today?

For us, a rich life means having enough money that money doesn't get to make all of our decisions anymore.

It's waking up and having choices. It's being present while our daughter grows up. It's doing meaningful work because we want to, not because we're terrified of what happens if we stop. We used to measure wealth primarily in dollars. Today, we measure a lot more of it in time.

And to Wrap It Up...

If you could change the world one happy couple at a time, how would you finish this sentence?

**"Why don't we...
Dream together?"**

We'd encourage every couple to sit down and dream about what their "rich life" looks like. What do you value most? What do you want your days to feel like? How do you want to spend your time? What experiences do you want to have together?

Then work in tandem and use your money to build a life aligned with those values.

We didn't work so hard to get better with money just to watch the numbers in our accounts get bigger. We wanted the numbers to make our lives bigger. More time. More choices. More experiences. More presence with the people we love.

Start with the life you want. Then build your money around it. For us, that's financial freedom.



**"We wanted the
numbers to make our
lives bigger."**

Your Turn: The Driveway Exercise

Inspired by Ali and Josh, grab a pen, a piece of paper, and your favorite person. Find somewhere quiet (a driveway works perfectly) and take turns answering: If money weren't the obstacle, what would our life look like? Where would we live? How would we spend a Tuesday? What would we regret not doing?

Write it all down. Keep the paper somewhere you'll both see it. That's your destination. Everything else is just the route.

Follow Ali and Josh's journey at [**@theficouple**](#) and learn more about their platform at [**@trydollarfi**](#).



Dollar FI

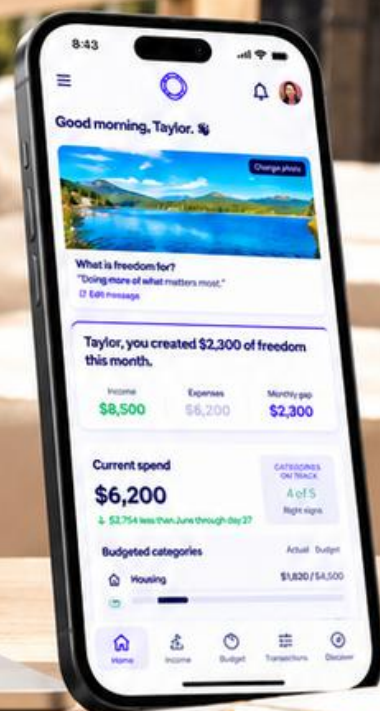
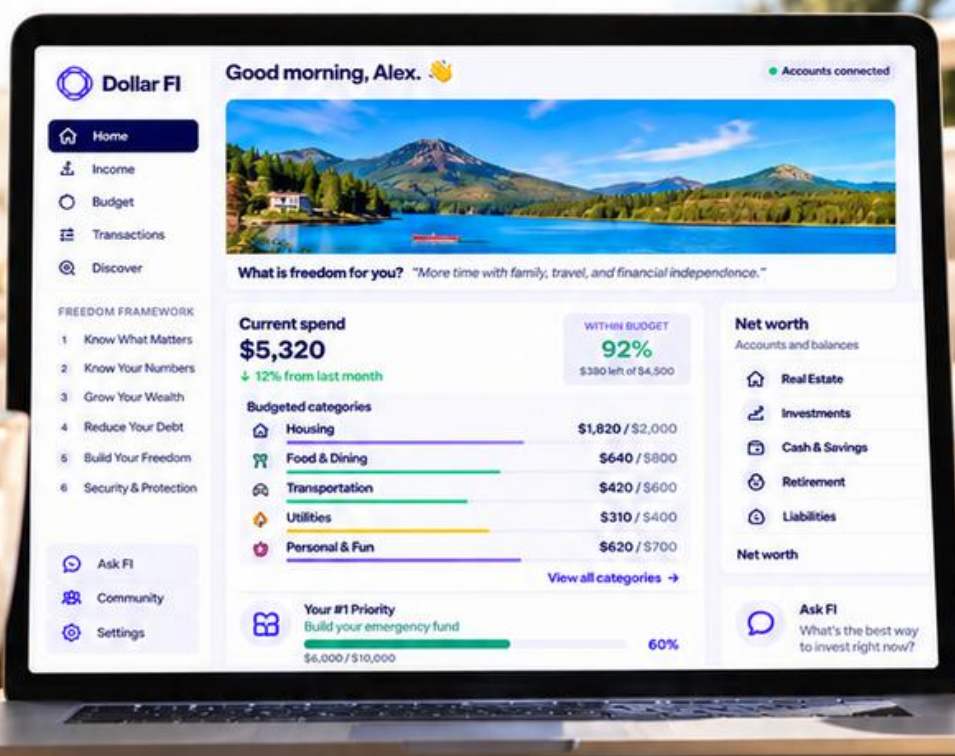
Your Home for Financial Freedom

Partner Spotlight • Sponsored

Good income. But feel stuck? *Let's build a plan that fixes that.*

*More time
for what
matters most.*

Get your financial life in one place, follow a personalized Freedom Plan, and join a member experience built to help you know what to do next—and follow through.



Get Clarity

See your income, spending and net worth in one place.



Follow a Plan

A personalized roadmap to your financial goals.



Learn Together

Join a supportive member community.



Feel Confident

Make informed decisions to build long-term freedom.



*Scan to
get started*

FREE TO START
TAKES ABOUT 2 MINUTES

*Your freedom
starts here.*

WHEN ONE PARTNER IS GROWING FASTER THAN THE OTHER

New habits, new goals, new you. And a partner who suddenly feels a step behind. Let's talk about it.

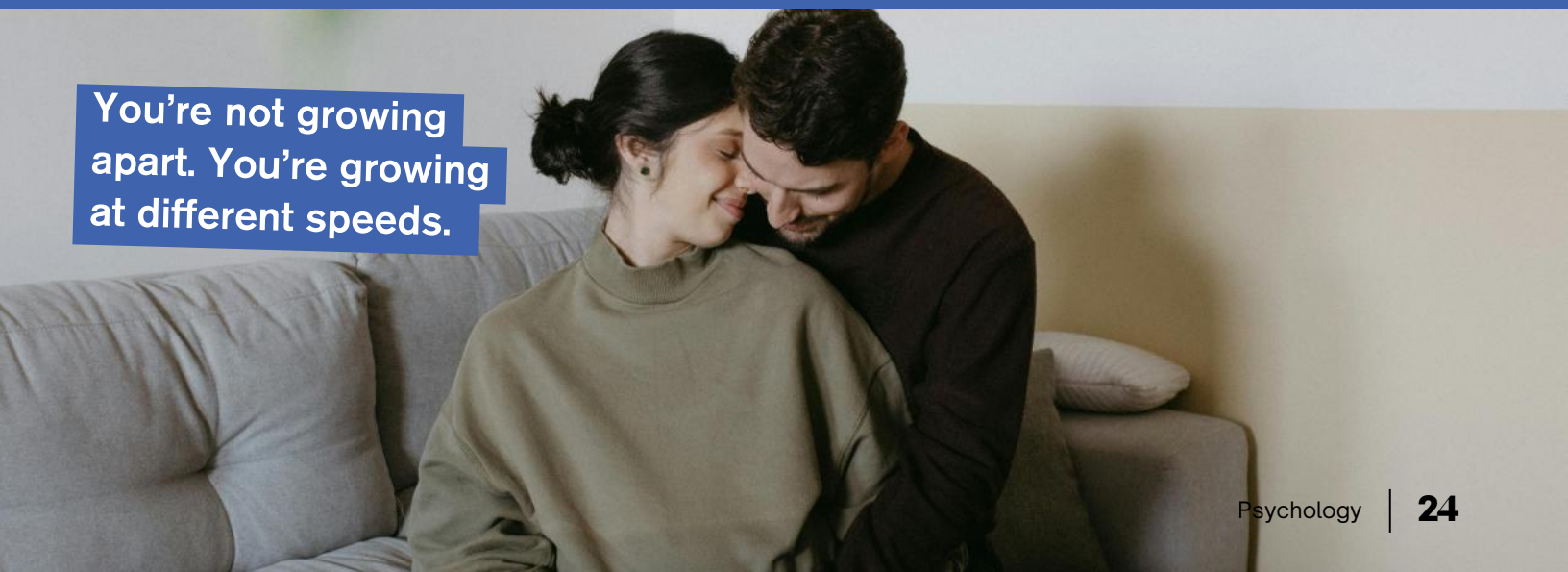
A friend of mine went through a serious glow-up last year. 5 a.m. runs. Therapy. A podcast queue that could fill a library. She felt amazing. Then one night her husband said, half joking, "I feel like I'm dating your old self and competing with your new one."

Ouch. And also... fair. When one of you is changing fast, it's exciting for one person and a little scary for the other. That doesn't mean you're growing apart. It means you're growing at different speeds, which is completely normal and very fixable.

If You're the One Growing

- Invite, don't preach. Nobody wants their partner to become their life coach. Share what excites you, not what they "should" be doing.
- Share the why. "Running clears my head" lands better than "you should really try running."
- Remember it's not a race. Your partner doesn't need to grow in your direction, or on your timeline.

You're not growing apart. You're growing at different speeds.





If You Feel Left Behind

Get curious, not threatened. Ask what's lighting them up. You might find something you love too.

Say it out loud, kindly. "I'm proud of you, and sometimes I feel a little left out" is honest without being a guilt trip.

Find your own thing. Growth is contagious in the best way. It doesn't have to be the same thing, just something that's yours.



The Fix: One Together, One Each

Here's the simple rule I swear by: pick one thing you grow at together (a class, a book you both read, a weekend walk) and let each of you keep one thing that's all your own. Together keeps you connected. Separate keeps you interesting.

And make time to catch up on who you're each becoming. Ask "What's exciting you lately?" and really listen. It's a surprisingly good way to meet the newest version of the person you love.

The goal isn't to grow the same. It's to keep choosing each other while you grow.

Growing at different speeds isn't the problem. Forgetting to turn around and wave at each other is.



The baby making *era*



Ovulation apps, peeing on sticks, and sex with a calendar invite. Here's how to try for a baby without forgetting you're still a couple (who actually like each other).

Nobody warns you that trying for a baby turns your phone into a fertility oracle, your bathroom into a lab, and your sex life into something with a calendar invite.

One day you're spontaneous. The next, one of you is texting "window opens tonight" like you're coordinating a rocket launch. It's romantic. Sort of.

If you're in what we lovingly call The Baby-Making Era, welcome. You're in very good company: the World Health Organization estimates that around one in six people will face fertility challenges at some point, and plenty more will spend at least a few months learning more about cervical mucus than they ever planned to. This isn't a medical guide (your doctor has that covered). This is about the other thing you're growing right now: the two of you.

Welcome to the Era

It starts so cute. You stop using birth control, you whisper baby names in bed, and sex suddenly feels like it has main-character energy.

Then month two arrives. And month three. And suddenly you own an app that tracks your temperature, a drawer full of ovulation strips bought in bulk, and a search history that would confuse an alien anthropologist. You've become, without meaning to, a small and slightly obsessive research team.

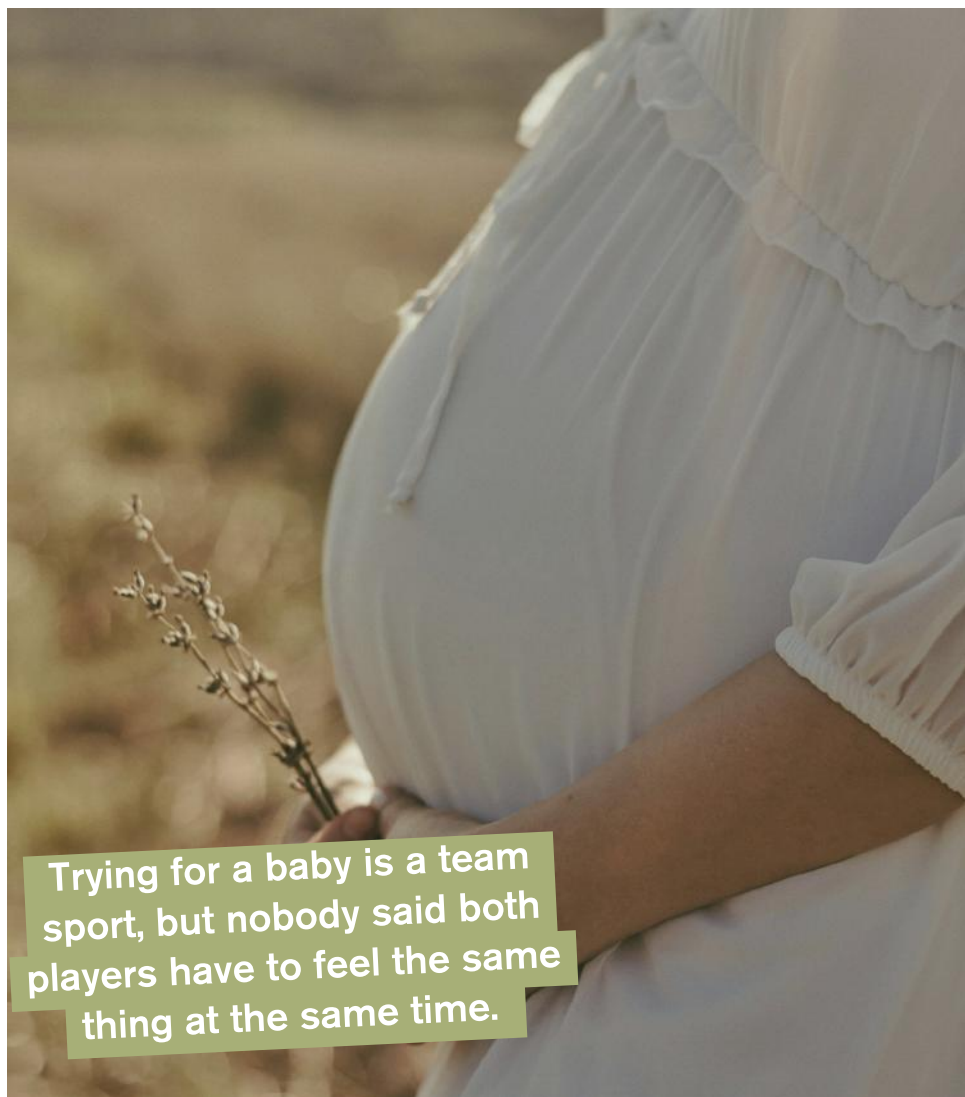
And nothing reveals how differently two people think quite like the two-week wait.

The Two-Week Wait: Two Very Different Experiences

Her take: Every twinge is a sign. Tired? Sign. Hungry? Sign. Dreamt about a duck? Probably a sign. I have googled "early symptoms" in ways I'm not proud of.

His take: I'm trying to be supportive, but I genuinely don't know if I'm allowed to be hopeful, and every time I ask "how are you feeling?" it seems to be the wrong question. So I make snacks. Snacks feel safe.

Neither of you is doing it wrong. You're just doing it differently. The trick is noticing that before it turns into "you don't care as much as I do." (He does. He's just expressing it through snacks.)



Trying for a baby is a team sport, but nobody said both players have to feel the same thing at the same time.

When Your Sex Life Gets a Calendar Invite

Let's be honest about the least sexy part of trying to get pregnant: sex starts to feel like a task. When there's a "window," desire becomes optional and attendance becomes mandatory. It's hard to feel irresistible when your partner is checking an app before checking you out.

The good news? It's very fixable. A few house rules we swear by:

Give it a code word. Nobody feels seductive after "the app says today." Agree on a private signal instead, like an emoji, a song, or a sticky note on the fridge that says "pizza?" (Only you two know it doesn't mean pizza.)



Protect “off-duty” sex. Keep some intimacy that has zero to do with timing. No tracking, no goal, no pillow propping. Just the two of you remembering why you liked each other in the first place. If you need a nudge back to playful, a round of **Spice It Up** at home is a very good place to start.

Allow a no-guilt pass. If one of you really can't tonight, the month isn't “ruined.” Pressure is the fastest way to kill the mood, for everyone.

Keep the little touches. Kitchen kisses, holding hands on the couch, falling asleep tangled up. They don't “count” toward anything, which is exactly why they matter.

The Five House Rules of the Baby-Making Era

The Baby Talk Curfew: Cap baby talk at about 20 minutes a day. Fertility counselors swear by this one. Charts, cycles, what-ifs: they get a time slot, not the whole house. After curfew, you're just two people who love each other and argue about what to watch.

No-Baby Zones: Pick moments where the topic is off-limits: Sunday brunch, your evening walk, date night. If you've forgotten how to talk about anything else, bring **Talk For Hours** along to brunch and rediscover the person you married before they became your co-scientist.



Spice it up + Talk for hours Bundle - Making happy couples

The Test-Day Game Plan: Decide ahead of time how you'll handle test day. Together or separately? Morning or evening? And, most importantly, what's the plan either way? Maybe it's your favorite takeout, maybe a walk, maybe a no-talking movie night. When you've planned for both outcomes, the result doesn't get to steal your whole day.

The "Who Knows?" Pact: Are you telling your parents? Your best friends? The group chat? Agree on it now. One of you wanting cheerleaders while the other wants total privacy is one of the most common (and avoidable) sources of tension. Nobody wants to discover the news has reached their mother-in-law via a cousin.

The Monthly "Are We Still Us?" Check-In: Once a month, ask each other one question: "Are we good, separate from the baby stuff?" Answer honestly. If the answer is yes, celebrate that. If it's wobbly, that's your cue to plan something that's just for the two of you.

Are we good, separate from the baby stuff? It might be the most important question of the whole era.

On the Not-So-Fun Days

We're keeping things light here, but we'd be lying if we said every month is snacks and code words. Some test days are just hard. That disappointment is real, and you're allowed to feel it, even if it's "only" been a few months.

On those days, you don't need a fix or a pep talk. Usually you just need your person. A few words that tend to land well:

"I don't need you to fix it. I just need you here for a minute."

"You don't have to be okay right now. I'm not going anywhere."

"Can we take one month off from trying and just be us?"



Dates for the Baby-Making Era

Because you are still dating each other, even with an app involved. A few ideas that have nothing to do with fertility windows:

The "Future Us" Brunch: dream about everything except the baby. Where do you want to travel in five years? What hobby do you each secretly want to try? Bring a deck of questions for the table.

The Couch Takeover: pajamas, your favorite comfort food, a ridiculous movie, and phones in another room. Low effort, high reward.

The Sweat-It-Out Date: a hike, a dance class, a long bike ride. Move your bodies for fun instead of for results.

The Throwback Night: recreate your first date or your favorite early-relationship spot. Remember who you were before the ovulation strips.



The bottom line

However your path to parenthood unfolds, and whatever the timeline, the relationship you build during this era is the one you'll raise your family in. So protect it. Flirt on purpose. Laugh at the absurd parts (there are many). Hold each other through the tough ones.

The couples who come out of this era closest aren't the ones who never had a hard month. They're the ones who kept choosing each other, test after test, window after window. And yes, the app can wait until morning.



If it's getting hard:

Fertility stress is real stress, and asking for help is a smart move, not a dramatic one. Talk to your doctor about timing. General guidelines suggest seeing a fertility specialist after 12 months of trying if you're under 35, after 6 months if you're 35 or older, and sooner if you're over 40 or have a known health concern.

Consider a specialist therapist. Counselors who focus on reproductive mental health understand this very specific kind of stress and can help you stay on the same team. Find your people. **Organizations like RESOLVE:** The National Infertility Association (resolve.org) offer support groups and resources for couples.

How to Support a Partner Through Burnout Without Burning Out Yourself

When your partner is running on 2% battery, here's how to help them recharge (and keep your own charger plugged in).

You know the signs. They come home and stare at the fridge for four minutes. “What do you want for dinner?” feels like a hostage negotiation. Their favorite show? Too much effort. This isn’t a bad week anymore. It’s burnout, and it’s moved into your house. Loving someone through it is part of the deal. Losing yourself in the process isn’t.

Signs It’s Burnout, Not Just a Rough Week

They’re exhausted even after resting, and weekends don’t seem to help. Things they used to enjoy suddenly feel like chores, and they’ve been more irritable, cynical, or checked out than usual for weeks.



Burned-out partners don't need a big date. They need a laugh.



You can't pour from an empty cup, even for someone you love.

What Actually Helps

Take one thing off their plate. Not “let me know if you need anything” (they won’t). Pick something specific: “I’ve got dinner and bath time this week.”

Ask: vent or solve? Sometimes they need a strategy. Most of the time they just need you to nod and say “that sounds awful.”

Protect their rest. Guard their downtime like a bouncer. Say no to the extra plans for both of you.

Keep connection low-effort. Burned-out people don’t need a big date. They need a laugh. A few silly rounds of **Laugh Together** on the couch can do more than a fancy dinner.



Laugh together -
Making happy
couples

Now, Your Oxygen Mask

Supporting someone through burnout is a marathon, and nobody runs a marathon on an empty tank. Keep your own things: your workout, your friend dates, your quiet coffee. It’s not selfish. It’s what makes you able to keep showing up.

And say it out loud when you need a break too: “I love helping you. I also need an evening to recharge. Can we plan for it?”

When to Encourage More Help

If the exhaustion lasts for weeks, affects their sleep or health, or starts to look like something heavier, gently suggest talking to a doctor or therapist. Offer to help book it. That’s support too.

Burnout is temporary. The way you show up for each other through it is what they’ll remember.

5 Conflict Resolution Techniques Every Couple Should Know

Conflict isn't a sign that something is wrong. Here's how to use it to grow closer.

I used to think conflict was a sign that something was wrong. That tension meant rupture. That raised voices meant we were headed for the end. But over time, as a partner and a therapist who has spent the last two decades studying how humans love, I've come to believe something else entirely: **Conflict is not a problem. Unrepaired conflict is.**

In fact, when approached skillfully, conflict is one of the most important ways couples grow. It's a portal to deeper intimacy, built through clearer boundaries and more conscious connection. But to walk through that portal, we need tools, not just to manage tension, but to work with it.

Here are five of the most important conflict resolution techniques every couple should know. They're practices we teach in Relationship Transformation: The Art of Rupture and Repair, and ones I use in my own marriage, often imperfectly, always with reverence for the courage it takes to stay.

1- Pause Before You Pounce:

When the heat rises and your heart starts to race, that's your nervous system alerting you to danger. But in most couple fights, it's not actual danger. It's perceived emotional threat: disconnection or abandonment.

Before you speak, pause. Just a few deep breaths (four seconds in, six seconds out) can shift you out of reactivity and into self-regulation. Why? Because emotional regulation isn't just about willpower. It's physiological. Neuroscience tells us that calming your body first gives your prefrontal cortex, your wise adult brain, a chance to re-engage.

Personal note: my partner Keith and I have an agreement. If either of us says, "I need five," it's sacred. It doesn't mean we're avoiding. It means we're choosing presence over pattern.



**In relationships,
debates have no
winners. Only
disconnection.**

2- Use the Imago Dialogue Structure

Most of us didn't grow up learning how to listen without interrupting. We learned how to defend and explain. Rarely did we learn how to simply listen.

The Imago Dialogue format is deceptively simple, and revolutionary in practice. Here's the basic structure:

- Mirror: "What I hear you saying is... Did I get that?"
- Validate: "That makes sense to me because..."
- Empathize: "I imagine that might feel..."

This isn't about being robotic. It's about creating emotional safety through containment. The speaker feels seen; the listener builds capacity to stay present without needing to rescue or refute.

Pro tip: the moment you start defending yourself, you're no longer in dialogue. You're in a debate. And in relationships, debates have no winners. Only disconnection.

3- Shift From Blame to Ownership

Language matters. Instead of "You're always so selfish," try: "I notice that when I don't feel considered, I get scared I don't matter." This isn't just semantics. It's attachment-informed communication.

When we shift from blame to ownership, we take responsibility for our emotional experience without outsourcing it. This fosters mutual empathy and interrupts the pursue/withdraw pattern so many couples get stuck in.

Clinically speaking, this is called differentiation: the ability to hold onto yourself while staying connected to another. It's one of the most important developmental tasks in adult relationships.



4- Name the Hurt Underneath: What's the deeper need beneath the frustration?

Anger often masks something softer: loneliness, or the longing to be truly seen. The more fluency you have with your inner world, the more intimacy becomes possible.

One of the techniques I teach in our Relationship Transformation course is called "Name and Claim." You practice saying the vulnerable thing first:

"I feel like I'm not important to you."
 "I'm scared you'll leave me."
 "I want to feel closer, and I don't know how to ask."

5- Repair, Repair, Repair:

No matter how skilled you are, you're going to rupture. We all do. The question is: can you come back and own it? A solid repair includes four things:

Acknowledgment: "I see how that impacted you."

Responsibility: "That was mine. I wasn't regulated."

Empathy: "I imagine that felt scary or frustrating."

Commitment: "Next time I'll pause before responding."

Research suggests that couples who repair quickly and consistently have stronger immune systems and more resilient nervous systems.

Rupture isn't the end of the story. It's the place where the next layer of intimacy gets built, if you're willing to come back for it. So the question isn't whether you'll fight again. It's: when you do, what kind of repair will you offer each other?



About the author

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When Sex Feels Like a Performance

If your brain runs a live commentary in the bedroom, you're not alone. Here's how to turn down the pressure and turn up the fun.

"Is my stomach doing that thing?" "Am I taking too long?" "Was that noise weird?" If this sounds like the soundtrack of your sex life, congratulations: you're in bed and in the audience at the same time.

Sex researchers have a name for it: spectating. It's when you mentally step outside yourself to watch and judge your own performance. It's incredibly common, and it's one of the fastest ways to take the fun out of intimacy. The good news? It's very fixable.



Ways to Stop Performing

Ditch the finish line. Sex isn't a test you pass or fail. When closeness and pleasure are the goal (not a specific ending), the pressure drops dramatically.

Come back to your senses. When your brain starts narrating, pick one sensation and focus on it: the warmth of their skin, the feeling of their hands. It pulls you out of your head and back into your body.

Be kinder to your body. Your partner isn't grading you. They're usually too busy enjoying themselves (or worrying about their own stomach).

Talk about it outside the bedroom. Pressure shrinks when you say it out loud, over coffee rather than under the sheets:

"Sometimes I get in my head in bed and worry about how I'm doing. Can we slow things down and make it more about fun?"

Play instead of perform. Games are a secret weapon against pressure, because the card makes the decision, not you. And when a game builds slowly, there's no big moment to "perform" for.

Try This: Let Spice It Up Set the Pace

Spice It Up is built to move through every stage of intimacy, one step at a time, with three decks that go from mild to spicy:

- **Mild:** conversation starters and flirty questions that get you talking, laughing, and looking at each other (not at yourselves).
- **Medium:** playful dares and light touch that shift the mood naturally, with zero pressure to rush.
- **Spicy:** bold challenges for when you're both relaxed, connected, and ready to turn up the heat.

Emotional connection first, physical connection second. By the time you reach the spicy deck, you're too busy having fun to overthink it. And you never have to get there: stopping at medium is still a win.

Emotional connection first,
physical connection second.
That's how pressure turns into
play.



Spice it up - Making
happy couples

Good to know

If performance anxiety sticks around, or comes with pain or other concerns, a certified sex therapist can help. It's more common (and more fixable) than most people think.

The best sex isn't the most impressive. It's the kind where you both forget anyone could be watching, including yourselves.

BODY CARE: THE RITUAL YOU'RE SKIPPING

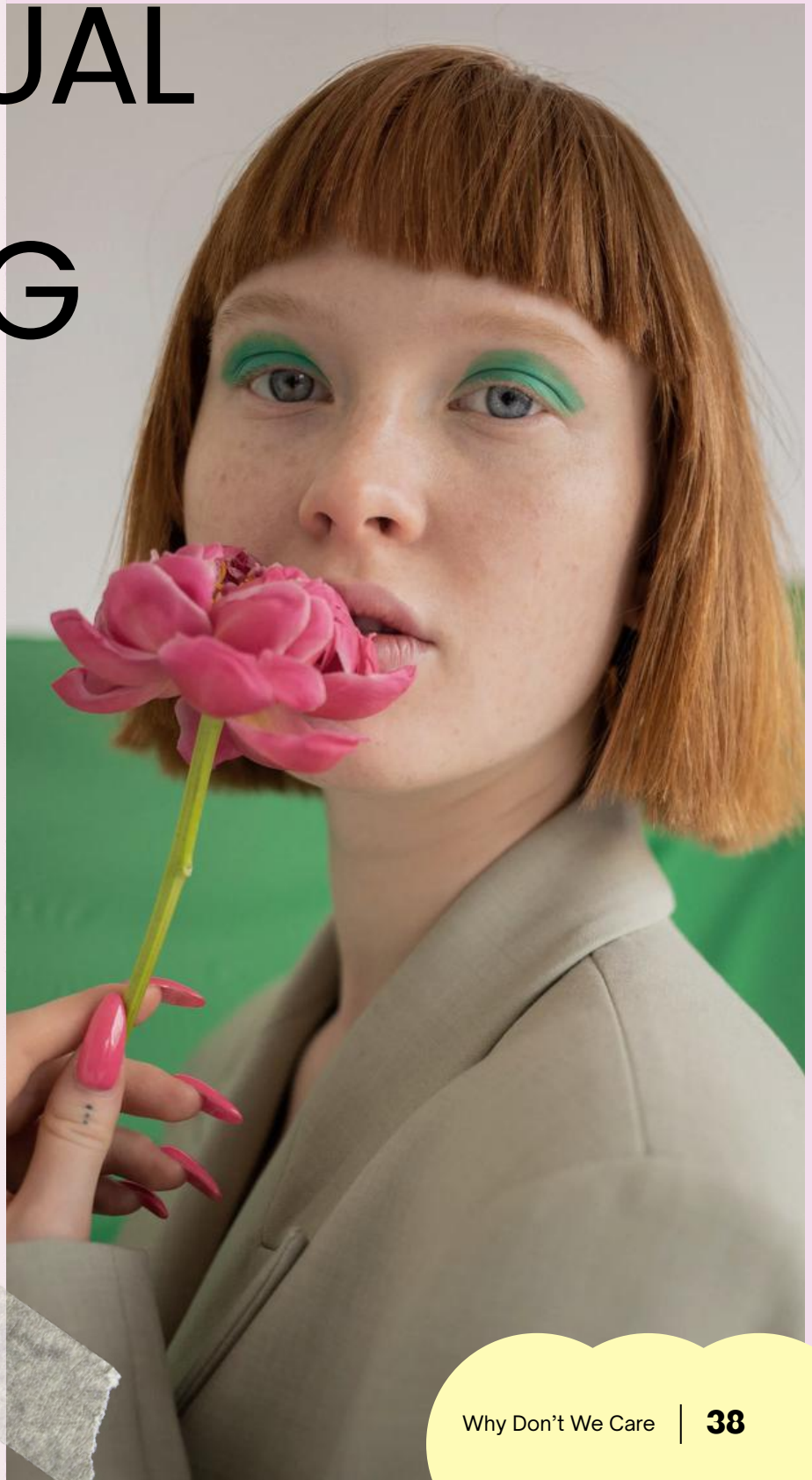
Your skin doesn't end at your jawline. Here's how to care for the rest of it, and why it's better with two.

Let's be honest about something: most people's skincare routine stops at the neck.

The face gets the serum, the eye cream, the SPF, the whole carefully curated lineup. The body? Maybe a quick swipe of lotion if there's time. Maybe nothing at all.

And yet the body is 90% of your skin. It's also the part that gets touched the most by weather, by fabric, by daily life, and by the person sleeping next to you. It's time to give it some attention.

**Most people's
skincare routine
stops at the neck.**



The Three Things Your Body Skin Actually Needs

Exfoliation, once or twice a week: Dead skin accumulates on the body just like on the face, but slower and over a larger area, which is why rough elbows, dry knees, and uneven texture are so common. Exfoliation fixes this. Two options:

Physical: a sugar or salt scrub, dry brush, or exfoliating glove. Gentle circular motions, because the goal is smooth, not red.

Chemical: a body lotion or wash with AHA (glycolic or lactic acid). No scrubbing needed, and lactic acid is especially good for keratosis pilaris, those small bumps on the back of the arms almost everyone has.

Rule of thumb: exfoliate before you moisturize, and moisturize right after the shower while skin is still slightly damp.



How your body feels, and how it's touched, matters more than any serum on your face.

Hydration, every single day: The body loses moisture constantly, especially after showering (hot water strips the skin's natural oils), and it needs to be replenished. This isn't optional; it's maintenance.

What to look for in a body moisturizer:

Ceramides: repair and strengthen the skin barrier. The most important ingredient for dry or sensitive skin..

Shea butter or cocoa butter: rich, occlusive, and long-lasting. Better for very dry areas like elbows, knees, and heels.

Hyaluronic acid: draws moisture into the skin. Better in lighter formulas for normal or combination skin.

Application tip: warm the product between your hands before applying. It absorbs better, and the process feels less like a chore.

Oils, for the moments when you want more

The step most people skip, and the one that makes the biggest difference. Applied after moisturizer (or mixed into it), body oils add nourishment and a subtle glow no lotion alone can replicate.

Good options for most skin types: jojoba (absorbs quickly, non-greasy), sweet almond (lightweight, great for sensitive skin), or rosehip (for uneven tone or stretch marks). They also double as massage oils, which brings us to the best part.

The Couple Element: Touch as Connection

Physical touch communicates care, safety, and intimacy in ways words often can't. It releases oxytocin, reduces cortisol, and builds closeness. And yet in long-term relationships, non-sexual touch quietly fades; life gets busy, routines get efficient, and affection outside of sex becomes rare.

A shared body-care ritual, even a short one, brings it back. No pressure, no agenda.

Start simple: after a shower, ask your partner if they'd like you to apply lotion to their back or feet. No elaborate setup required.

Or try a massage night once a week: warm some oil, dim the lights, take turns. It doesn't have to be professional. Slow, intentional pressure on the shoulders, neck, and lower back is enough. The point isn't perfection; it's presence.



A Simple Routine to Start This Week

- **In the shower (2 min):** exfoliating glove or sugar scrub on arms, legs, and rough areas. Twice a week.
- **After the shower (3 min):** body lotion neck to toe while skin is still damp. Every day.
- **Once a week (15–20 min):** body oil massage with your partner. No agenda, just hands, warmth, and attention.
- Under 5 minutes daily. One longer ritual weekly. That's it.



Products Worth Having

You don't need an elaborate lineup. These are the essentials:

Exfoliation: sugar scrub, exfoliating glove, or a body lotion with lactic acid.

Daily hydration: any lotion with ceramides and glycerin. CeraVe, Vaseline Intensive Care, and Nivea are solid, affordable options.

Massage: jojoba or sweet almond oil, warmed slightly before use. Add a few drops of lavender for calm, or peppermint for energy.

Your skin doesn't end at your jawline. Care for it like it matters, because how your body feels, and how it's touched, matters more than any serum on your face.

**The body exists.
It's time to treat
it that way.**

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