

How Can We Keep Our Marriage Strong as We Age?



As couples age, keeping a marriage strong can become a challenge. Children move away, mental and physical health challenges arise, complacency creeps in, and retirement can create more time together than you are used to. For these reasons and others, gray divorce – the divorce rate among adults 50 and older – has doubled since 1990.

Consider these tips to nurture your marriage as you grow old together.

- **“TNT” try new things.** Keep your relationship alive by finding new ways to play together. Try new activities or sports, take a class together, try new restaurants, or go to events you may not otherwise attend. It might include going on that bucket list vacation or buying season tickets to the theater or a sporting event. We tend to be creatures of habit, so overcoming autopilot and being open to adventure is essential.

- **Keep communicating.** Stay in tune with who your partner is and who they are becoming. We all change over time and may develop new preferences or have new goals, dreams, and plans. Turn the TV off and put your phone in another room regularly so you can connect. Have check-in conversations at least weekly to discuss upcoming plans, expectations, and schedules to keep you on the same page.
- **Avoid affection deprivation.** Stay in touch. As we grow older, it is common for couples to experience relationship ruts, and many tend to demonstrate less physical affection. Research continues to show the power of touch. Whether you are holding hands, hugging, giving gentle pats, or sitting next to each other while watching a movie, an electrical connection occurs, and chemicals of love and attachment are released. This, in turn, can draw you closer together and help relieve stress. Affection can also be shown through surprises, gifts, saying I love you, and random acts of service.
- **Balance time together and time apart.** When children move out of the house, couples often have more time on their hands. While trying new things together is important, time apart can also benefit your relationship. Have lunch with a friend, neighbor, or sibling. Spend an afternoon or evening with friends playing a sport or participating in a club. These activities can be invigorating and interesting, causing the positivity and happiness to spill over into your relationship at home. In addition, having downtime doing something you enjoy can be refreshing and provide a boost to you, which, in turn, boosts your relationship.