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CUT STRAIGHT TO YOUR NEWS

GOOD TO KNOW

LOOKING AFTER No.1

Stuck in a relationship rut? Putting yourself first could be the answer to getting back on track

Have you ever been in a relationship that's going really well, when suddenly the spark seems to fade away? It could be that you've emotionally checked out of your relationship.

According to life coach Dain Heer, this happens when you put the needs of your other half before your own.

"When you make your partner the sole source of joy in your life, you stop doing things you used to enjoy – and often lose contact with people who may otherwise nurture you. As a result you're left with less energy, less joy and lots of resentment, because you're no longer putting yourself first," he says.

But, he adds, you can get that joy and energy back by making yourself a priority. "And it's not as difficult as you might think."

Annie Gurton
Relationship counsellor

Dain Heer
Life coach

"We've been taught that, in order to prove we care, we have to put our own needs second – but that simply doesn't work," he says. Rather, making yourself happy first means everything else in your life will begin to line up as well.
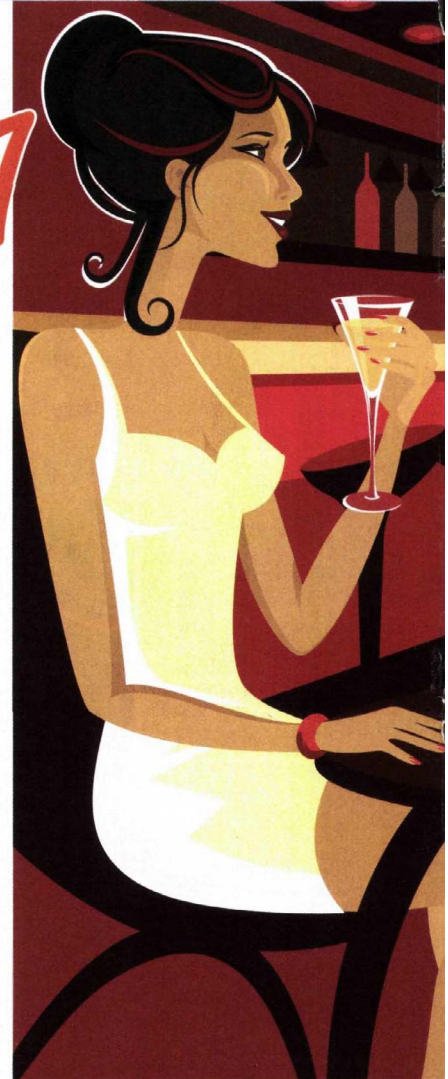
♥ Take stock of your relationship

Whatever stage you're at in your relationship, it's important to stop and take stock every so often, to allow you to pinpoint any behaviour that might be causing a rift. Dain says the problem is that most of us live our lives, and our relationships, on autopilot. Checking in with your thoughts and feelings is a fantastic way to flag any developing issues and nip them in the bud.

Start by making a list of all the good points in your relationship. Then write down any negative aspects, including those personal interests you've given up to be with your partner.

"If you're not aware there's a problem then you can't do anything to make the situation better. But by being conscious of what's wrong in your relationship, you can work towards making more positive changes," he says.

♥ Learn to love yourself

As clichéd as it sounds, there's truth in the saying "you can't love anyone else before learning to love yourself." Often called self-care, listening to your own emotional needs is strongly connected to better health and wellbeing.

"Putting yourself first starts with being willing to do whatever it takes to nurture your mind and body," Dain explains. When you do that, you'll experience a greater sense of happiness and freedom that allows you to love your partner in a more meaningful way.

Dain says one of the reasons people become unhappy in their romantic relationship is that they have stopped caring for themselves.

♥ Reconnect with old friends

When you first enter into a new relationship, it's normal to want to be with the other person all the time. But, according to relationship counsellor Annie Gurton, spending too much time with your significant other isn't necessarily wise long-term.

"Both you and your relationship can benefit from taking time out to spend with old friends," she says. "It's really important to keep up with at least a few old friends, and make sure that you see them regularly."

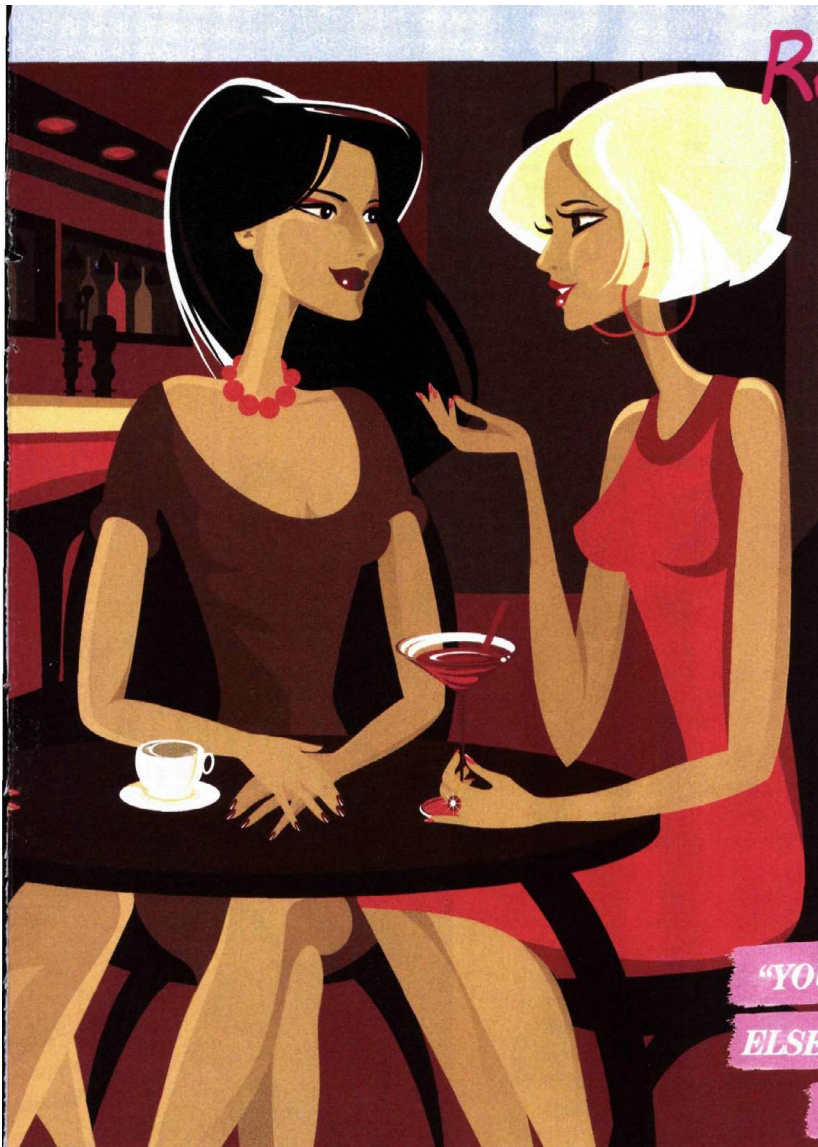TEXT: MARK BROOK PICTURE: GETTY IMAGES

Relationships

"This helps to recreate some of the intrigue and mystery that made the first few weeks and months so intense and interesting," she says.

Whether it's book club, dancing or playing the guitar, if it's been a while since you last did your thing, Dain says it's important to do it again as soon as possible – not tomorrow, but today.

"When you do things that bring value to your life, it benefits everyone else around you as well," he says.

Annie suggests the best approach is to take small steps and keep checking back with your partner.

"If you both feel secure and trust in each other, then your relationship can soon be improved by having those diverse outside interests," she says.

♥ Look on the bright side

Dain says if you want to foster a happy and healthy relationship, let go of any resentments and expectations that have developed over the years.

"For every negative thought you hold in place, you're actually putting a brick in the wall between you and

"YOU CAN'T LOVE ANYONE ELSE BEFORE LEARNING TO LOVE YOURSELF"

Dain says friends can be a terrific sounding board and enrich your life in many ways, but that in plenty of cases, people give up spending time with them in favour of their relationship.

"As a result, you're missing out on an additional source of support, which can take pressure off your partner because they're no longer solely responsible for your emotional wellbeing," he says.

If you've lost contact with friends, Dain says it's worthwhile reconnecting with those special people.

Likewise, set personal boundaries in a new romance.

"If you establish early on that you'll be spending time with your old friends, your relationship is more likely to be healthier than if you live in each other's pockets," Annie adds.

♥ Enjoy activities that bring you joy

Putting yourself first includes making time to enjoy things that make you happy. While compromising on your personal interests and hobbies is often an inevitable part of a relationship, Annie suggests that you explore some of those interests again now.

your partner. But letting those feelings go will allow your relationship to grow stronger," he says.

Annie agrees that hanging on to any negative thoughts can spoil an otherwise healthy relationship.

"In most cases, thoughts such as these stem from unresolved childhood issues, which may prevent you from accepting your partner for who they are," she says.

Annie suggests that if you do find yourself bottling up feelings of anger, sadness or resentment, a therapist can help you get things back on track.