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## 5-minute marriage makeovers

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# 5 *minute*



A little coffee, a little nuzzle, and  
he'll be heels over head happy.



# e marriage makeovers

These quick, no-sweat strategies will smooth out the bumps, bring the sexy back, and, ultimately, make your love last. They're too easy *not* to do. By Colleen Oakley

**I**t turns out that love is in the details: "We know from marriage and divorce research that it's the everyday things—having fun, connecting, and showing you care—that make or break a marriage," says Debra Castaldo, Ph.D., author of *Gifts of Love*. We heard the same from other experts, real couples, and even one of America's greatest living poets. So we worked up this list of 17 fast little somethings that'll help you and your guy go all gaga for each other again.

**SHARE STORY TIME.** "My husband and I used to take turns giving a bath and reading books to our daughter at bedtime," says Alisa Bowman, author of *Project Happily Ever After*. "But one night, my husband crawled into bed and listened while I read to her. It was a very sweet moment to have us all lounging there together, and now we do it regularly. It only takes a few minutes to read a bedtime story, but I always feel closer to him when it's over." If you're not in the reading-with-kids phase, read novels aloud to each other. Especially the good parts.

**Open a bottle of wine.** A study published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* in 2010 found that couples who drink together report feeling closer and having fewer relationship troubles than people who imbibe alone or don't drink at all. But don't turn into a Tennessee Williams play: The best effects were seen when couples had one to three drinks and sipped similar amounts.

**WASH THE CAR,** pull the garbage to the curb, or handle whatever chore he always takes care of. It'll help you appreciate what he does for both of you. "Since I took on some of the bill paying, my husband is calmer and our marriage is less stressful," says Jennifer Lee, 45, a life coach in Winter Springs, FL. "A tiny thing made a huge difference."



## HAVE A QUICK BITCHFEST

(just not about each other). "It's very detrimental to a relationship to pretend you're always doing great," says Brian Grossman, Ph.D., a relationship expert and author of *Learning to Listen: Did You Hear What I Think I Said?* So vent about whatever's bugging you: your job, your mom, this morning's rude barista. "You'll immediately feel closer. And don't feel pressured to come up with solutions; this exercise is more about sharing your feelings with each other."

## Brag about your better half.

And do it when you're both right there. "When my husband and I are out with other people, talking about marriage or parenting or work—anything, really—I love to say what a great dad and friend he is to me and our daughter," says Linnet Overton, 31, from Nashville. "Sure, he blushes up a storm, but I know it makes him feel good to know he's appreciated. And when he publicly compliments me, it reminds me that I'm loved and valued."

Bring him his morning coffee, just the way he likes it. A small, sweet gesture can go a long way toward making him feel loved—and makes him happy to reciprocate.

**Share a sexy dream in full detail.** "Our brains are the biggest factor in making us feel turned on," says sex therapist Ian Kerner, Ph.D., author of *She Comes First*. "After you've had sex with someone a thousand times, it's the mental stuff that keeps things hot."

**Read this poem.** It's romantic, a little whimsical, and a little surreal. Now doesn't that sound like marriage?

## LITANY

You are the bread and the knife,  
the crystal goblet and the wine.  
You are the dew on the morning grass  
and the burning wheel of the sun.  
You are the white apron of the baker,  
and the marsh birds suddenly in flight.

However, you are not the wind in the orchard,  
the plums on the counter,  
or the house of cards.

And you are certainly not the pine-scented air.  
There is just no way that you are the pine-scented air.

It is possible that you are the fish under the bridge,  
maybe even the pigeon on the general's head,  
but you are not even close  
to being the field of cornflowers at dusk.

And a quick look in the mirror will show  
that you are neither the boots in the corner  
nor the boat asleep in its boathouse.

It might interest you to know,  
speaking of the plentiful imagery of the world,  
that I am the sound of rain on the roof.

I also happen to be the shooting star,  
the evening paper blowing down an alley  
and the basket of chestnuts on the kitchen table.

I am also the moon in the trees  
and the blind woman's teacup.  
But don't worry; I'm not the bread and the knife.

You are still the bread and the knife.  
You will always be the bread and the knife,  
not to mention the crystal goblet and—somehow—the wine.

—BILLY COLLINS



You never realized the sex appeal of a sink full of dishes, did you?

**BREAK OUT THE FANCY CHINA.** You know, the stuff from your registry that you only dust off at the holidays. Set the table with it, even if you're just grilling burgers, and light a candle or two. You'll instantly add meaning to an ordinary night. "Right after my husband and I got married, I got a job in another city and we relocated. It was a stressful period, transitioning into a new place," says Jaime McMurtrie, 31, of Atlanta. "When we finally moved into our home, we broke out our nice wedding china, which was in storage and had never been used, and cooked dinner together. It made the meal feel so special and gave us a chance to reflect on all the huge changes in our life. It was the start of a great, really sweet tradition."



**Make a toast.** “I’m constantly traveling for work, and one time I had back-to-back trips and hadn’t seen my husband for weeks,” says Monica Pedersen, 40, host of HGTV’s *Dream Home* and *Bang for Your Buck*. “We were catching up on the sofa in our living room. I raised my wine glass and made a heartfelt toast to him, letting him know that there was no place I would rather be than with him and how grateful I was for his constant encouragement and support. Now it’s a tradition on our date nights.”

### ASK FOR WHAT YOU WANT, ALREADY.

Had a rough day at work and badly need a hug? Don’t just stand there; tell him. “Early in our marriage, a therapist suggested that my husband and I tell each other exactly what makes us feel loved,” says Lori Jo Vest, 48, from Troy, MI. “My list included little things like him washing the bath towels, kissing me good-bye every day, and warming up my car on cold mornings. Nine years later, he still does those things, because he wants to make me happy—and knows exactly how to do it.”

Get some distance. If you come home in a terrible mood, take five. Sit on the deck or go grab the mail—so you don’t pick at your hubby when you don’t really mean to.

### GO TO BED AT THE SAME TIME—EVEN IF YOU DON’T STAY THERE.

“When we first got married, I was a night owl, and my husband, Mike, had to get up early for his job,” says Melody Brooke, 54, from Richardson, TX. “Our mismatched schedules made us feel really disconnected from each other. So we started a habit that we’ve kept up to this day, 12 years later. When one of us goes to bed, the other one climbs in too for a quick cuddle. Even if Mike or I get up afterward, it’s a way to always connect after a long day.”

### Dance to your wedding song.

“A few weeks ago, I was in the kitchen with my husband and 9-month-old son, chopping onions and listening to the radio. Out of nowhere, our wedding song started playing: Chuck Berry’s ‘You Never Can Tell,’” says Jessica Bliss, 30, from Nashville. “I grabbed our son, spinning him in circles and singing. My husband laughed and joined in. Having our little man with us was a reminder of how much happiness we have enjoyed since our first dance.”



Hey, whatever gets you all steamed up.

**Get in the shower with him.** It doesn’t matter how jam-packed your days are: Any couple can grab five minutes of absolutely alone, soaking-wet face-to-face time (be it sexy or just warm and sudsy) first thing in the morning or last thing at night.

Act like teenagers and have a semipublic makeout session. Remember how thrilling it was in high school? It’s even better now.

### ASK HIM AN OUT-THERE QUESTION.

“Relationships get stale when we think we know everything about each other, so genuine curiosity is the biggest turn-on there is,” says Karen Kimsey-House, coauthor of *Co-Active Coaching*. “I love being surprised when my husband gives me an unexpected answer.” Here are a few of her favorites—what will your guy say?

- ➔ What’s your favorite outfit of mine and why?
- ➔ What’s something that you have never told anyone else—including me?
- ➔ If you could be beamed to any place in the universe right now, where would you go?