

# Healthy Life ~ Happy Marriage

*17 Healthy Ideas for  
Your Life and Marriage*

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Healthy Life – Happy Marriage  
17 Healthy Ideas for Your Life and Marriage

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If you're like most married women, life is pulling you in a hundred different directions. You're on the go most of your waking hours – working, teaching, supervising, cooking, cleaning, chauffeuring – the list goes on and on. You may feel tired, frustrated, and stressed a lot of the time. You'd like to be living a calmer and healthier life – and enjoying your marriage more, but don't know where to begin – or don't think you have time to make the kinds of changes it would require.

The goal of this book is to convince you that **you can make those kinds of changes**, and to offer practical ideas for moving in that direction. It doesn't encourage you to make sweeping changes all at once or to completely upend life as you know it. That rarely works (except perhaps in times of crisis), and probably isn't necessary. Rather, what the book does is offer 17 ideas for changing your life in small ways **that will lead to more calm, better health, and greater joy and intimacy in your marriage**. It also provides links to additional information and resources.

Of course, one little book can't cover all the changes you could make in order to live the life you really want. Maybe the change you need to make is entirely different from the ones presented here. If that's the case, I hope that reading this book will spur your thinking and help you identify the change(s) that's right for you.

Thanks for downloading the book and taking the time to read it. I hope it helps you begin making changes that will allow you to live a calmer, healthier and sexier life. And if you enjoy reading it, I'd also love for you to join the conversation with other like-minded women at [Calm.Healthy.Sexy](http://Calm.Healthy.Sexy).

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# Getting Started



Healthy Life – Happy Marriage is divided into three sections – Calmer Life, Healthier Life and Happier Marriage. Each section shares 5 or 6 ideas for changing your life in a positive way. I suggest you read through all 17 ideas and **see which ones resonate most with you**. Make notes about them, then read back through your notes. **Which one or two ideas could make the biggest difference in your life?** Which one could give you the most “bang for your buck” – providing a substantial payback for a modest effort? For example, if clutter in your house is causing a tremendous amount of stress, the payback for taking several days to de-clutter and set up a system for managing your family’s “stuff” might be well worth the investment of time. Or, if you’re sleeping five hours a night and feeling terrible all the time, the effort you invest in revamping your schedule so you can sleep seven hours a night will pay you back many times over.

**Consider picking just one idea at first.** Most people do better if they focus on one area of change, rather than trying to change many things at once. (If you can make big changes or lots of changes at once – go for it!) Begin making changes related to that one idea. You may only need to change one thing, or you may need to change several over time. For example, if you want to start eating a healthier diet, you may need to make changes over several months, such as beginning to plan meals, replacing junk food with healthier food, spending time each week prepping fruits and vegetables, organizing your refrigerator and freezer, etc. Continue working on that one area until you begin to see real, sustainable change. It may take a couple of weeks, or it may take a few months. **Congratulate yourself for small successes along the way and keep moving forward.**

Once you’ve incorporated changes in one area into your life, pick another idea that resonated with you and begin working on it. The idea is to **make a number of small changes over time**, so that eventually you’re enjoying a healthier life and happier marriage.





## **Control your family's schedule.**

In many families, the schedule of activities controls almost everything, including meals, sleep, recreation, weekends, vacations, and down time (if there is any!). Frequently, it's the children's activities that occupy much of the schedule – sports, lessons, clubs, scouts and social activities. But sometimes the parents' activities aren't far behind, with committees, civic groups, church responsibilities and volunteer work packing the schedule too.

None of these things are bad. Problems begin to occur, however, when the schedule controls the family. When that happens, parents need to work together to turn things around – **they need to take control of the family's schedule, rather than letting it take on a life of its own.** At some point they may need to answer the question, “Is it more important for our children (or us) to be in every activity under the sun, or is it more important to enjoy our life as a couple and a family?” Don't assume that the schedule is set and won't change until your kids leave for college! **If it's causing stress and making your life difficult, change it.**

Here are three questions to ask as you think about your family's schedule:

***Who's in charge?*** Who is controlling your family's schedule? Your children? People at church or school who want your help with various projects? Your children's coaches or activity leaders? Members of your extended family? **If you want to live a reasonably calm and healthy life, then you can't let any of those people be in charge.** It's very easy to allow others to take on that power (often before you even realize it!), especially if you and your husband aren't actively managing your family's schedule. But if you allow anyone else to control it, stress, fatigue and frustration are almost guaranteed.

***What are our priorities?*** If you and your husband haven't established priorities for your marriage and family, take some time to set priorities for the next 6-12 months. Choose the things you want to define your family's life during that period, and **set those things up as a "frame."** This proactive approach keeps you from reacting all the time to new requests or demands on your time. For example, let's say all of your children are playing soccer this year, you've started exercising and are working to lose 20 pounds, you and your husband are leading a small group at church, and the two of you want to spend more time relaxing together. **That's it - those are your priorities!** When you add in work, homework, meals, laundry, housework and sleep - you're out of time and energy, and **if you commit to something else, your priorities will**



**suffer.** (Some things, like illnesses and job changes, can become priorities without your permission. But those things are the exception, not the rule.)

***Do we need to let go or say no?*** Finally, take a mental tour of your life and identify places where you or other family members need to let go or say no. Have you been doing something for a long time just because no one else has shown up to do it? **Maybe it doesn't fit into your "frame" for the year, and you need to let go of it.** Have you allowed your children to get involved in so many activities that you and your husband are running on empty trying to get them to every practice, game, meeting and event? **It may be time to help them let go of a few things.** And if someone has asked you to take on a new task and it doesn't fit with your priorities for right now, **it's probably time to just say no.**

Work through these three questions with your husband, then create a plan for better managing your family's schedule.

Additional information – [5 Strategies for Controlling Your Family's Schedule](#)



### **Create margins around your life.**

Dr. Richard Swenson, the author of [Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives](#), defines margin as the space between people and their personal limits - their limits of time, health, money and other resources. Although people in every generation have experienced stress and hard times, modern society has created new stresses, while also eliminating sources of margin available to previous generations, including extended family, concerned neighbors, community, downtime, and lower levels of stimuli.

For women, margins provide a "cushion" around their lives, allowing them to hold some time, energy and resources in reserve for unexpected events, emergencies, and high-stress periods. **Margins also allow you to enjoy and devote time to the people and activities in your life, and to maintain your health and peace of mind.** If every day is packed with activities and responsibilities, it's difficult to eat well, exercise, spend quality time with your husband and family, and generally enjoy life.



How can women create margins that will allow them to enjoy life, rather than trudging through each day with a to-do list that's a mile long? Here are **four ways to build additional margins** - the space between your life and your limits - into your life:

***Decide which activities and commitments make sense in your life right now, and stop doing or say no to others.*** Some activities that made sense at an earlier stage of your life (or will at a later stage) aren't right for your life right now. And it's perfectly acceptable to let go of them.

***Elicit and accept help from other people.*** Enlist the help of your husband, family members or friends, or pay someone to do a few things for you. Don't think that you have to do everything yourself or it won't be done "right." In most cases, that just isn't true. And even if it is, being done "right" is less important than creating a calmer life for you, your husband and your family.

***Don't use busyness and activities as a primary source of self-esteem.*** If you base your self-esteem on being the busiest person around, the one who can juggle everything with ease and then take on more, you may be setting yourself up to crash and burn. And more than likely, the people who love you are hungry for less of your efficiency and more of your time and attention. So figure out ways to be less "efficient" and more "present."

***Don't use small margins as a means of controlling situations or avoiding problems.*** If you suspect that the margins in your life are small for this reason, please consider letting go of some of your activities, addressing the issues you're avoiding, and building some joy, community and intimacy into your life. (If the issues are very difficult, consider enlisting a counselor or other professional to help you address them.)

Additional information - [Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives](#), [The Marriage Benefits of Margin](#)



## Learn to say "no."

*"Every time you say "yes" to one thing, you say "no" to something else."*

Many women have a hard time saying "no." For many reasons, they're conditioned to say "yes," even if "yes" isn't the best thing for themselves, their marriages or their families. They also have

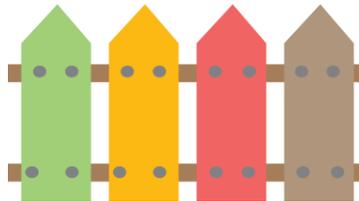


a hard time saying “no longer” or “not anymore” – letting go of tasks they’ve said “yes” to, even if it’s clearly someone else’s turn to do them.

Is saying “yes” too often, or not saying “no” often enough, causing stress in your life? If so, it may be helpful to figure out why that’s the case. **But it may be even more helpful to simply start saying “no.”** You may want to talk with your husband about it and enlist his help. Many husbands are good at saying “no,” (at least mine is!) and would love for their wives to say it more often. Consider putting some strategies in place that will slow things down and give you time to think about your response to a request. For example, decide that you won’t ever say “yes” on the spot. Practice saying “I need to think about that.” Or agree with your husband that the two of you will confer before saying “yes” to any new activities or responsibilities. That way you can say “My husband and I need to talk about our schedules. I’ll get back to you.”

If you’re already enmeshed in an activity that you’d rather not be doing, begin planning a graceful exit! Let those in charge know that you plan to step down, and give them enough (but not too much) time to find a replacement. Don’t fall into the trap of thinking “If I don’t do it, nobody will.” If nobody else will do it, maybe it doesn’t need to be done. Even if it does need to be done, that doesn’t mean you have to do it.

Additional information – [5 Words You Need to Learn to Say](#), [7 Simple Ways to Say “No”](#)



### **Reduce clutter.**

*“Clutter, it turns out, is procrastination.” Leo Babauto, Zen Habits*

For many women, living in the midst of clutter causes tremendous stress. It’s hard for them to feel comfortable in their own homes or work spaces because the stuff around them feels messy, disorganized and jumbled. Plus, trying to find the things they need often sucks up valuable time, creating even more stress. If clutter is dragging you down, make a plan for getting it under control. Start small – **de-cluttering one small area can make a tremendous difference, and you can use that success as a starting point for other successes.** And make it a priority – you may need to put other tasks aside for a while until you get some of your clutter under control. (For me, de-cluttering pays a huge dividend in terms of stress reduction and peace of mind, so it’s worth making the time to do it.)



One way to tackle the amount of “stuff” in your house is to take on a 30-Day Clutter Challenge. The idea is simple – every day for 30 days, get rid of five items in your house (or 10, if you’re really ambitious or have a lot of stuff). Decide if each item should be thrown away (in which case, throw it away immediately) or given away (to a charity or someone who can use it). Put the giveaway items in a box. When the box is full, deliver it to the recipient(s) and start a new box. After 30 days, you’ll have 150 fewer items to clean, organize or manage. If you have a lot of clutter, consider taking a break and then doing the Challenge for another 30 days.

Another approach is to “containerize” things in order to create a less cluttered appearance and feeling. Almost every jumbled area, from your closets to kitchen cabinets to sock drawers can be improved by using simple containers to organize “like” items. For example, a jumbled, cluttered purse causes a lot of stress for me. So I use a purse insert/organizer from Divide and Conquer that features lots of pockets and pouches, a perfect way to “corral” all of my stuff and reduce one area of clutter in my life.

Additional information – [The Quickstart Guide to a Decluttered Home](#), [Freedom from Clutter in 40 Days](#)



### **Take mini-breaks from your daily routine.**

Many women push themselves hard all the time. They run fast and furious all day, finish each day exhausted, collapse into bed, and start the routine all over again the next morning. One way to break that cycle (in addition to taking control of your family’s schedule!) is to take regular mini-breaks from your schedule and responsibilities.

A mini-break should transport you out of the daily grind, even if only for 15 or 30 minutes. It should relax, refresh or energize you, depending on what you need on a given day. And it should be something **you want to do**, not something other people think you should do.

Here are 5 tips for incorporating mini-breaks into your life:

***Determine what kind of mini-breaks work best for you.*** Make a list of things you could do for 15 or 30 minutes that would revive you. Also think about mini-breaks that would take longer than 30 minutes, activities you might only do once or twice a week.



***Take at least one short mini-break every day.*** You deserve 15-30 minutes a day to regroup and try to maintain your sanity! Figure out what works with your schedule and set that time aside. It can be anything that refreshes your body, mind or spirit - taking a walk, soaking in a warm bath, exercising, reading a good book, listening to music, enjoying a cup of coffee with a friend, talking with your husband - whatever appeals to you. And you can choose different activities on different days.

***Take at least one longer mini-break each week.*** Once or twice a week, take a longer break from your daily routine. If you have small children, get out of the house by yourself. If you normally eat lunch at your desk, take it outside on a beautiful day. Put the kids to bed and watch a relaxing movie. Spend an hour working on one of your hobbies. Ask your husband for a back rub (and give him one the next time!)

***Don't confuse "playing with technology" with "taking a mini-break."*** Often, when women are tired at the end of the day, they'll zip through Facebook and flip through some Web sites on their laptop or phone. But you know what? Very often, those things aren't relaxing. **They can make you feel tense, and they waste valuable time that could be used for mini-breaks that actually refresh you.** If you find yourself doing those things during your down time, make sure you really find them relaxing. If you don't, use that time for something better.

***Include your husband.*** Husbands need mini-breaks too, so make sure you both have time to recharge and rejuvenate. And take some of your mini-breaks together. Going on a date is a type of mini-break, but so is going for a walk, playing a game, watching a movie, or making love.



# Healthier



## **Get more sleep.**

Sleep affects your body and health more than you may realize. You know that good sleep in sufficient quantities makes you feel great, and that poor and inadequate sleep makes you feel terrible. But did you know that sleep also plays significant roles in memory, metabolism, immune health, mental health, weight gain or loss, and libido? Some research even suggests that sleep plays a role in diabetes, heart disease and other chronic health conditions. So if you want to live healthier, feel better and enjoy life more, you need adequate sleep. For most adults, that means 7 to 8 hours per night. Yes, a small percentage of people need less and a small percentage need more. But for most people, 7 to 8 hours is a healthy goal.

Maybe you don't need to be convinced that you need more sleep, you just need to figure out how to get it. Here are a few ideas to get you started: Decide that your health and peace of mind are important (because women often put themselves last on their list of priorities). Determine what's keeping you from getting enough sleep. Is it things that matter, or time wasters like television or social media? If it's the former, figure out new ways of getting them done; involve others, and don't try to do everything yourself. If it's the latter, stop doing them until you establish a healthy sleep pattern. And take steps to improve your sleep quality, such as allowing yourself time to relax and unwind before you fall into bed. Enlist your husband's help – chances are, he would be happy for you to get more sleep.

Additional information – [Are You Getting Enough Sleep?](#)



## **Be physically active every day.**

Regular physical activity (or exercise) is one of the best things you can do for your body, mind and spirit. Physical activity improves your health – reducing the risk of diabetes, heart disease, stroke and some forms of cancer. It reduces stress. It helps you control your weight. It tones



your muscles and keeps your joints limber. It energizes you. It's difficult to say it strongly enough – **moving your body for at least 30 minutes a day, five or six days a week, is simply one of the best things you can do for yourself** – and the benefits spill over into your marriage and family life. It's worth the effort you'll need to invest in making time to do it.

So how does a busy woman, with a husband, family, home, job, and myriad other responsibilities, find time for physical activity? **First, make it a priority.** Decide that you need and deserve a strong, healthy body and acknowledge that a strong, healthy body requires regular physical activity. **Second, pick one or two activities you enjoy and can probably fit into your busy schedule.** Walking, biking, swimming, hiking, exercising with DVDs, dancing with your husband, playing soccer with your kids – anything you enjoy and are reasonably likely to do. **Third, figure out ways to sneak at least 30 minutes of one of those activities into your day.** Think you don't have time? Make time. Walk for 15 minutes at lunch and 15 minutes in the evening. Take your children to the park – but don't sit on the bench, keep moving. Walk around the soccer field while they're at practice. Walk while they're at dance class or music lessons. Use any exercise equipment you have in your house. (My husband and I have a treadmill in our bedroom. It's ugly and it's in the way (we can barely open our dresser drawers), but we use it almost every day.) Fit in quick exercises here and there. **Change the way you do things so that moving, rather than sitting or standing, becomes your “default setting.”**

(\*The Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans recommend that adults participate in moderate physical activity for at least 150 minutes per week. People with chronic health conditions or symptoms, or those who have concerns about participating in physical activity or exercise, should consult their physician about safe ways to be physically active.)

Additional information – [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), [Exercise Tips and Routines for Busy Women](#), [4 Ways Exercise Can Improve Your Health – and Your Sex Life](#),



### **Stop eating junky food.**

Your body deserves better. Better than food full of sugar, salt, artificial colors and ingredients you can't pronounce. Better than fast food, packaged food, and fake food –which includes about half of the food on your grocery store shelves. Come on, you know it's junk. **You deserve better, your body deserves better, your family deserves better.**



So start eliminating those foods from your family's diet. **Pick one thing and cut way down on it.** If possible, over time, eliminate it completely. Start with whatever you think is the biggest problem for your family. You might want to focus on an ingredient, such as high fructose corn syrup, artificial color or hydrogenated fat. Or start with a type of food, like fast food, salty snacks or soft drinks. Just pick one. After you've eliminated it or reduced it significantly (it may take weeks or even a couple of months), start working on another one. Over time, these changes will make a significant positive difference in your health and the health of your family.

Additional information – [Bad News about Processed Food](#), [Salt Sugar Fat – How the Food Giants Hooked Us](#)



### **Eat more real food.**

What is "real food," and why should you eat more of it? This may not be the technical definition, but it's a good working definition - **real food is the food your great grandparents ate. It's the food everyone ate, back when food came from farms, not factories.** Basically, real food is food you eat in its natural or near-natural form. Here are 3 reasons to incorporate more of it into your family's diet:

***Real food is delicious*** - Fresh fruits and vegetables in season, real cheese, natural peanut butter on a banana, baked sweet potatoes with a little butter, whole wheat bread, grilled chicken - all of these taste absolutely wonderful. **In many ways these foods qualify as true delicacies, and the processed foods that fill our grocery stores rank as sorry pretenders.** But, if your family has been eating a lot of processed foods, the transition to the natural taste of real food may be rocky. Remember that food manufacturers are using salt, sugar, and fat to "encourage" us to eat more processed foods. So make the change gradually, introducing one or two real foods at a time while easing some processed foods out of your family's diet.

***Real food is nutritious.*** When you eat foods in their natural or near-natural form, you benefit from all of their God-given nutrients. When you eat foods that are manufactured, you benefit only from the nutrients food companies have decided to put back in, after removing many of the food's original nutrients. **That makes so little sense, it's amazing we've all gone along with it for so long!** Fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts, dairy, meat and other whole foods provide the full array of nutrients the human body needs - the ones that are known and the ones science has yet to discover. And they provide them in ideal amounts and proportions.



***Real foods can be economical.*** This isn't always the case because, at least initially, eating real food can seem like an expensive proposition. For example, organic foods clearly are more expensive than conventional foods. And high-quality foods often cost more than low-quality foods (real whole wheat bread vs. white bread, for example). But it's also true that a meal cooked at home with real ingredients often costs less than a meal prepared with processed foods, and generally costs much less than a restaurant meal. And, **in terms of nutrient value, real foods always win.** For the cost of a large bag of potato chips, for example, you can buy a number of nutrient-dense bananas or apples. And you'll get a lot more food value out of a bag of brown rice than a couple of boxes of cheesy rice mix, for about the same amount of money. Fruits and vegetables in season are always a good value, and even real food goes on sale sometimes. So yes, eating real food can be economical, but it does require some thought and planning.

Additional information – [Juggling Real Food and Real Life](#), [Real Food](#) by Nina Planck, [Food Rules](#) by Michael Pollan



### **Make small changes in the way you and your family eat.**

Maybe you aren't ready to stop eating junky food completely. Maybe the idea of eating more real food makes you feel incredibly tired. Maybe the thought of changing your family's diet in any substantial way seems overwhelming. But you want to do something. That's fine – just focus on making one or two small changes. Sometimes a little change is all it takes to get the ball rolling. Here are some to consider:

***Serve two fruits or vegetables with every meal.*** They don't have to be fancy – grapes, apple slices, sugar snap peas and carrot sticks are great.

***Organize and package healthy snacks on Sunday*** so they'll be ready to grab and go on weekdays – things like grapes, berries, whole grain crackers and peanut butter, carrot sticks, and cheese cubes.

***Plan at least three sit-down family dinners each week.*** They can be simple meals like baked chicken, baked potatoes, a steamed vegetable and some fruit; grilled fish, brown rice and a salad; or a large salad topped with grilled chicken and shredded cheese.

***Make extra dinner and enjoy the leftovers for lunch*** at home or at work.



**Replace some of your family's white/processed grain foods with whole grain foods**, such as whole wheat bread, whole wheat pasta, or brown rice.

**Buy the best quality meat and chicken you can afford.** Many families can't afford organic or grass-fed beef (mine can't!), but try to buy hormone-free/antibiotic-free beef and antibiotic-free chicken whenever possible. Those meats go on sale sometimes, so look for sales and stock up.

If you bake, **begin using some healthier ingredients in your baked goods.** For example, consider using some whole wheat flour in place of white flour, honey or maple syrup in place of white sugar, and butter instead of shortening.

**Avoid foods that contain high fructose corn syrup**, and anything that has sugar as one of the main ingredients.

**Start shopping more on the perimeter of your grocery store** (where most of the real foods are located) and less in the middle aisles (where most of the processed foods are located).

**Begin visiting a farmers' market or farm stand every week.** Plan a couple of meals around the fruits and vegetables you buy there.

**Plant a garden** or grow some vegetables in big pots.

**Begin easing soft drinks out of your family's diet.**

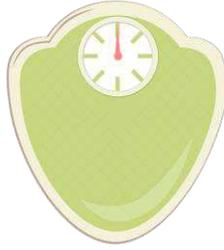
**Eat the real thing** – Use butter instead of margarine, half and half instead of coffee creamer, cheese instead of “cheese food,” ice cream instead of frozen dessert.

**Serve “real food” breakfasts** such as oatmeal, low-sugar whole-grain cereal, whole wheat toast with peanut butter, smoothies you make with real fruit, and Greek yogurt with fruit.

If you find that you're too busy to make small changes in the way your family eats, **take a serious look at your schedule (and your children's schedules).** If your family is going to eat healthy foods, you may need to make some changes to one or both.

Additional Information – [Eat More Real Food – Getting Started](#), [Prep Food on Sunday to Eat Healthier all Week](#)





## Maintain a healthy weight.

So many women struggle to maintain a weight that helps them feel good about their bodies. More than half of American adults are overweight, and many women find it extremely difficult to lose weight and maintain a healthy weight. Although women don't have to be thin in order to be attractive, confident and sexy, being overweight does affect the way many women feel about their bodies, and it often reduces their confidence and self-esteem.

Losing weight can be hard, but it doesn't have to be complicated. Here are six steps you can take to get started. **Whether you want to lose 10 pounds or 50 pounds or even more, these steps can help you move in the right direction.**

***Set a realistic initial goal.*** Success breeds success, so set a goal you know you can achieve. A goal of “40 pounds in two months” will set you up for failure, but “10 pounds in 6 weeks” is likely to set you up for success. Once you've enjoyed the accomplishment of reaching your initial goal, set another.

***Train your body to be satisfied with less food.*** This *does not* mean you should adopt an extremely low-calorie diet! Those kinds of diets aren't healthy, and they may not help you lose weight. Most experts say not to eat less than 1200 calories per day, but 1400-1500 when you're trying to lose weight is probably more realistic for most women. However, **many people are accustomed to eating more calories than they actually need each day.** If that's the case for you, you may need to train your body to be satisfied with less. Some of the strategies listed below (eat more whole foods, drink more water) can help. So can including some healthy fats in your diet, as well as spreading your calories out a bit across the day. For example, a breakfast of Greek yogurt and fresh fruit eaten across a couple of hours (rather than all at one sitting) can prevent mid-morning hunger and help you feel satisfied until lunch.

***Eat foods in their natural or near-natural state.*** Foods in their natural state (real foods and whole foods) contain more nutrients and fiber and fewer added sugars, starches, fats and chemicals than processed foods. Often (although not always), they're lower in calories. Very often, they're more filling. So whenever possible, eat foods in their natural or near-natural state – whole wheat bread rather than white bread, whole fruit rather than fruit juice, fresh vegetables rather than vegetables with cheese sauce, peanuts rather than packaged peanut butter crackers,



grilled chicken breast rather than deli chicken salad – you get the idea. And include some natural fats in your diet, such as those contained in olive oil, nuts and avocados. They help you feel full and help your body function optimally.

If you tend to rely on processed foods to feed yourself and your family, **start with small changes**. Pick a few foods and move toward eating a more natural version – Greek yogurt with fresh fruit instead of fruit-on-the-bottom yogurt, grilled fish rather than breaded fried fish, whole wheat pasta with real cheese rather than packaged macaroni and cheese. Or start with one meal – fix extras of some foods (grilled chicken, brown rice, stir-fried vegetables, whole grain pasta, salads, etc.) and enjoy them for lunch, rather than grabbing fast food. Start with a few changes and when you're comfortable with them, make a few more.

**Drink more water.** Ditch the sodas (even diet) and limit the number of "liquid calories" you consume. Take water with you everywhere and drink it throughout the day. If you dislike drinking plain water, make your own fruit waters. No one seems to know exactly how much water women should drink every day, but most of us need to drink more. Water helps you feel full, helps your body function well, reduces fatigue and helps your skin look beautiful.

**Move your body every day.** There's no way around it – almost everyone who wants to lose weight and keep it off has to be physically active. Every day, or almost every day. So pick something you enjoy and start doing it. Walking is great. You can walk throughout the day and accumulate a lot of physical activity by the end of the day – you don't have to do it all at once. If possible, use a [pedometer or FitBit](#) or something similar to track your physical activity. Or bike, jog, hike, play soccer with your kids - anything that gets your body moving. In addition, do strengthening exercises 2 or 3 days a week to tone muscles and build strength - you can find hundreds of workouts online.

**Track your progress.** It's much easier to lose weight if you keep track of what and how much you're eating and how much you're moving. Most people underestimate how much they've eaten and overestimate how much they've exercised over the course of a day, so it really helps to monitor things as you're doing them. You can use an app like MyFitnessPal on your phone (or online at [www.myfitnesspal.com](http://www.myfitnesspal.com)) to set a weight goal and track what you eat and how much you exercise. Based on your current weight and weight loss goal, the app lets you know how many calories you should eat each day and helps you monitor how many calories you've eaten and how many you've burned. And if you really enjoy technology, get a [FitBit](#) and sync it with your MyFitnessPal account. The two apps will work together to monitor your diet and physical activity each day.

Additional information – [Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans](#), [5 Ways to Maintain a Healthy Weight](#), [25 Fast and Easy Ways to Exercise](#), [FitBit Alta](#)





## Identify and “speak” your husband’s love language.

*The 5 Love Languages*, by Dr. Gary Chapman, teaches a simple, powerful tool that can bring joy to a typical marriage, or change the course of one that’s struggling. The book explains that **every person experiences love through one (or sometimes a combination) of five “languages” - Words of Affirmation, Acts of Service, Receiving Gifts, Quality Time, or Physical Touch.** If you don't know the "language" that allows your husband to feel and experience love, you will struggle to make him feel loved. Sometimes, a wife tries to love her husband using her own love language (and vice versa). But if her husband "speaks" a different language, her efforts will fall short, frustrating both of them. Here’s how Dr. Chapman describes the frustration and confusion that can ensue when a person doesn’t know and speak his or her spouse’s love language: "Your emotional love language and the language of your spouse may be as different as Chinese and English. No matter how hard you try to express love in English, if your spouse only understands Chinese, you will never understand how to show love to each other. **Being sincere is not enough.** We must be willing to learn our spouse's primary love language if we are to be effective communicators of love."

**If you don't know your husband's love language, take the time this week to identify it.** Buy (or borrow) a copy of *The 5 Love Languages* - it's well worth the modest investment. If you can't do that right away, do some research on the five languages so you begin to understand them, and try to identify your husband's primary language. Here are some resources to help you get started:

- [The 5 Love Languages website](#) describes the languages, answers questions, and provides links to books and information.
- [Understanding the 5 Love Languages](#) presents a series of articles Dr. Chapman wrote for Focus on the Family online.

Once you’ve identified your husband’s love language, begin showing your love for him **in the language he understands.** This can be difficult if his language is different from yours, but it's well worth the effort. Here are a few ideas for showing love in each of the primary languages:

- **Words of affirmation** - compliment him, thank him for something he does for you or your family, encourage him in his work or hobby, speak kindly and set a tone of kind language in your home, ask for his help.



- **Quality time** - give him your undivided attention, spend time together doing something fun, participate with him in an activity he enjoys, eat meals together, ask him about something of interest to him and really listen to his answer, go to bed at the same time.
- **Receiving gifts** - stock up on snacks and treats he likes, give him a card that expresses your love, buy him something he needs, buy him something he wants, give him tickets to an event he will enjoy.
- **Acts of service** - think of things he has asked you to do in the past and do one of them, do something that will make his week a little easier, do one of his chores for him, cook his favorite meal, help him with a project or task.
- **Physical touch** - hold hands when you're walking together, hug and kiss him when he comes in the door, sit close to him when you're watching TV together, pat his butt when you walk by him, rub his back or neck.



### **Focus time and attention on your marriage.**

After a couple has been married for a few years, and especially after one or two kids arrive on the scene, the marriage often drops down on the priority list. Kids take a lot of time and energy, jobs require a lot of attention, the house and yard need work, church and community responsibilities mount – before long, all of your time, energy and emotions have been spent, leaving little or nothing for you and your husband as a couple. Don't let that happen to you! And if it has happened, turn it around! **Your marriage should be the primary relationship in your family.** Many parents seem to think the relationship with their children takes highest priority. Maybe it does, but it shouldn't. Nothing will provide your children with the kind of security that a strong marriage provides. Nothing will show them more clearly that they are not the center of the universe than their parents taking time for each other. And nothing will prepare them for marriage the way watching their parents nurture their own marriage will.

Here are some things you can do to give your marriage the time and attention it deserves:

***Control your family's schedule,*** rather than letting it control you. (Yes, this is an ongoing theme of this book!) This doesn't mean your children shouldn't do activities, but it does mean you and your husband should talk and decide which activities are reasonable in terms of your time, energy and finances.

***Make time to talk every day.*** When things get busy, it's easy to go for days without talking about anything other than schedules, carpools, pick-up times and errands. Be intentional about taking at least **15-20 minutes every day to really talk with your husband** about what's going on in both of your lives. You can do it in the morning, right after work, before bed - whatever works



for the two of you. (My husband and I drink coffee in bed for about 20 minutes every morning and talk while we're waking up and preparing to face the day.)

***Go to bed at the same time,*** every night if possible but at least several times a week. Going to bed together lets you talk and unwind together and paves the way for sex and intimacy.

***Make love regularly.*** Yes, it takes time, and you're often tired. But it's critical if you want to stay connected as a couple. And it doesn't always have to take a lot of time - while a long romantic interlude is great, sometimes a quick romp provides all the connection you need!

***Establish one evening a week as 'parents' night.'*** Pick one evening each week (or at least every other week) and let the kids know you and your husband won't be available for extracurricular activities, homework help, school project disasters, or anything else (other than true emergencies) that evening. Put young children to bed as early as reasonable, and let older children work quietly on homework or other activities. **Then spend some time relaxing with your husband.** Ideally, this should be a set evening every week - you want your kids to learn to say, "No, I can't \_\_\_\_\_ tonight. It's 'parents' night.'" But realistically, it may need to change as work and school schedules change.

***Plan at least one face-to-face activity (which many women prefer) and one side-by-side activity (which many men prefer) every week.*** So, for example, you might enjoy a cup of coffee and some conversation at the kitchen table on Saturday morning, then paint a room together on Saturday afternoon.

***Do some everyday tasks or errands together.*** Once children come along, couples often "divide and conquer" the mundane tasks of everyday life. She gets groceries and runs by the post office, he drops off the dry cleaning and picks up a prescription. It's efficient, but boring. So once in a while, do some of those tasks together. If you have grandparents or a teenage neighbor who will watch the kids for a couple of hours, use them! And when your kids are old enough to stay home for a short time, let them! Run some errands together, then do something fun, like stopping by a coffee shop or frozen yogurt bar.

***Exercise together.*** Walk, jog or bike together. Train together for a charity walk or race. Take a hike. Anything that gets you moving together, preferably outside.

***Plan regular dates.*** At least once every two weeks, enjoy a date with your husband. It doesn't have to be the typical "dinner and a movie," just something that gets you out of the house and lets you have fun together.

Additional information – [16 Fun and Healthy Date Ideas](#), [10 Ways to Connect with Your Husband – When Life Gets Crazy](#)





## **Make sex and intimacy a priority in your marriage.**

Enjoying a satisfying sex life with your husband is an essential component of a healthy life and happy marriage. But, for a variety of reasons, enjoying sex on a regular basis is sometimes easier said than done. If a satisfying sex life has fallen by the wayside in your marriage, or even if it never quite got off the ground, here are three ideas for making it fun and making it a priority:

**Decide to make it happen.** When women get busy they get distracted, and sex often drops off their radar screens. They just don't think about it. But regular, enjoyable sex is important - really important - for creating a healthy marriage. So **decide to make sex a priority** for you. For example, you might decide that making love twice a week would create intimacy and promote harmony in your marriage. Or that you're going to initiate sex once a week. Or respond positively every time your husband initiates sex for two weeks. Whatever action on your part would promote better sex and increased intimacy in your marriage, decide to make it happen.

**Determine *how* to make it happen.** Although it seems decidedly unromantic to schedule or plan sex, very often that's exactly what you need to do. Let your husband know that this is a priority for you, and work together to figure out a plan. Maybe you'll need to clear some activities from your schedule or your children's schedules, or perhaps your husband will need to clear some from his, in order to make time for increased sex and intimacy.

**Ensure that it happens.** The steps to **ensuring that sex occurs regularly** will look different in every marriage. Some women may need time to unwind in the evening, rather than working like slaves until they fall into bed, exhausted. Some couples may want to plan sex for "off times," like Saturday mornings or during the kids' Sunday afternoon naps. And remember that good sex doesn't always require a marathon love-making session; sometimes "short and sweet" serves the same purpose - increasing fun, joy and intimacy in your marriage. Think it through and talk it over with your husband, then take the steps needed to ensure that sex becomes a priority.

(In some marriages, deciding to make sex a priority will not be enough. If you're experiencing difficulties in this area, the books, blogs and articles on the Calm.Healthy.Sexy. [Sex and Marriage Resources](#) page may be of some help. For women dealing with low libido in particular, [Pearl's Oyster Bed](#) has some great suggestions and encouragement. For those who have turned away from sex completely or almost completely, [The Forgiven Wife](#) offers hope and encouragement. And if you're experiencing significant problems or just need a bit of assistance, please consider seeking help from a professional counselor.)





## Get in touch with your sexy side.

One reason many women struggle with sex and intimacy in their marriages is that they just don't feel sexy. They may have felt sexy at one time (or maybe not), but somewhere between pregnancy and diapers and lack of sleep and carpool and soccer practice, they lost touch with their sexy side. Maybe they've moved past the exhausting years of raising young children, but now think they're too old to feel sexy, that it's a young woman's game and it's passed them by.

None of these things are true, but almost every woman has felt (or will feel) them. Every woman reading this book lives in a culture that worships youth and unrealistic standards of physical beauty. In most cases, the culture worships examples of beauty and sexiness that don't actually exist – they're created by photo editing and other tricks of technology. As Cindy Crawford once said, "I wish I looked like Cindy Crawford." But she doesn't. Cindy Crawford is a beautiful woman, but she doesn't look like the woman you see in pictures of her. No one does.

You can get in touch with your sexy side and feel sexy again, but it takes some time and effort. Here are some ideas to help you get started:

***Make it a priority, and set aside time for it.*** If feeling sexy and positive about your body is something you want to achieve, devote some time to it. Do you have to spend hours at a salon or spa each week? Of course not! But all worthwhile changes require some time and effort, so determine how you're going to fit working on this worthwhile change into your busy schedule.

***Read and learn about sexual confidence.*** Read the Song of Songs in the Bible. Whether or not you're a religious person, the Song of Songs is a beautiful ancient story of physical love between a husband and wife. For something a little more modern, Sheila Gregoire's [The Good Girl's Guide to Great Sex](#) and J. Parker's [Hot, Holy and Humorous](#) promote a positive view of women's sexuality and sex in marriage.

***Play up your strengths.*** What *do you* like about your body or your appearance? We spend so much time focusing on what we don't like about our bodies, we forget about our strengths. Maybe you have beautiful hair, a lovely smile, pretty eyes, a trim figure. Pick one or more of your strengths, and make it the best it can be. If it's your hair, get a good haircut. If it's your eyes, make them up every morning so they stand out. Wear clothes that flatter your figure. Wear a touch of makeup that draws attention to your pretty skin.



***Wear things that make you feel sexy.*** In the bedroom, wear lingerie that makes you feel sexy. For some women it might be silky pajamas. For others it might be a lacy gown or boy shorts or even a bra and thong. Focus on what makes you feel sexy and confident in your body, not what ads or store displays say you should wear. Outside the bedroom, sometimes wear a pretty bra and panties under your everyday clothes. Have a hot pair of shoes? Wear 'em! A skirt that hugs your curves just right? Wear it! Obviously, none one can do this all the time, but sometimes a woman just needs to ditch the sweats, raggedy jeans, or ho-hum work outfits for clothes that make her look and feel good.

***Exercise.*** If you want to feel confident and strong in your body, move it every day. You don't have to go to the gym, but you need to do something. Walk, bike, take a hike with your husband, run around outside with the kids, exercise with a DVD, lift some hand weights - anything that moves your body and makes it stronger.

***Consider losing some weight.*** Okay, let's be clear – women **do not** have to lose weight or be thin in order to feel sexually confident in their bodies. But, for many women, the primary source of feeling bad about their bodies is the weight they've gained over the years. If that's the case for you, consider losing some of that weight. Even a small weight loss can pay big dividends in increased confidence. If you weigh 25 pounds more than you should, a 10-pound weight loss is a tremendous achievement, one that can spark a new attitude about your body. It doesn't seem like much, but it really is significant. Think about a 10-pound bag of sugar; if you drop that much weight, you will invariably feel and look better. If you need to lose 50 pounds, a 20-pound weight loss can do the same thing.



## **Take a proactive approach to sex and intimacy.**

Enjoying sex and intimacy and feeling sexy can seem like a struggle for many women. If it feels that way to you, devote some time and energy to making it less of a struggle and more of a joy. Here are some ways to take a proactive approach to making that transition.

***Read sex-positive books and resources.*** Our grandmothers and the generations of women before them were very limited in what they could learn about sex and intimacy. Few books existed, churches didn't address it (except maybe to talk about the wife's "obligations"), and families didn't talk about it (beyond maybe a few hushed mother-daughter conversations). They had no way of learning, beyond trial and error, about sexual anatomy or the normal sexual responses of



men and women. Nobody talked about the fact that sex could and should be fun for them too, not just for their husbands. If they were lucky, a sister or friend who enjoyed sex might have shared some tips and a positive point of view. But most of the time, they were on their own.

For women today, however, the situation is completely different – the number of resources that present sex in a positive light has exploded. Books and blogs that educate and encourage women and men to make the most of sex and intimacy in marriage are everywhere. Anyone with access to a computer or a public library can find them. Check out some of the resources at the [CalmHealthySexy Sex and Marriage resources page](#). And considering joining the conversation on one or more of the great blogs listed there, all of which are sharing information regularly to encourage married women to enjoy sex and intimacy.

***Flirt with your husband.*** Yes, like when you were dating. It's sexy, and it can help you feel like a sexy, confident woman. Wink at him across the room. Kiss him for no reason. Make little suggestive remarks. Consider sending him sexy texts or emails. Find ways to let him know you find him attractive, which can also help you feel attractive. (Here are some [great flirting ideas](#) from Sheila Gregoire.)

***Listen to sexy music.*** Put together [a playlist of music that helps you feel sexy](#) and listen to it often.

***Initiate.*** Husbands tend to initiate most of the time, but wives can gain sexual confidence by doing some initiating of their own. Initiating also helps you remember that sex is about you too; it's not just something you "do for your husband." When you initiate, you can choose something that feels comfortable to you. Or you can choose something you know will be especially pleasurable for your husband (which can boost your feelings of confidence and power!) So try dimming the lights and building confidence by having your way with him.



### **Have some fun.**

Sometimes, the best way to set the stage for an intimate and sexy marriage is to have some fun together. When life gets hectic and schedules fill up, fun seems to fly right out the window and roll on down the street. Who has time for fun when children need to be supervised, houses need



to be cleaned, meals need to be cooked, homework needs to be done and 100 other tasks need to be completed? Actually, you do. That is, you do if you want to protect, strengthen and nurture your marriage. And I'm pretty sure that if you've read this far in this book, you **do** want to do all of those things for your marriage.

So set aside some time fairly regularly and just have fun together. You can do big things and small things, things that cost some money and things that cost nothing. Here are a few ideas to get you started:

- Look for Living Social or Groupon deals for fun activities.
- Get outside - go for a hike, ride bikes, take a picnic.
- Take a day off and explore your town like tourists. Bonus - stay overnight in a local hotel and enjoy some "hotel sex" and a break from your day-to-day responsibilities.
- Make a campfire in your backyard and spend an evening outside together.
- Try a restaurant that's completely different from your favorite restaurants.
- Play a game together – enjoy an old favorite or learn a new one.
- Go to a show, concert or sporting event.
- Build something out of Legos or blocks.
- Learn something new together (photography, dancing, kayaking, anything new that the two of you might both enjoy).
- Go away together for a night or a weekend and do something new and different.
- Change up your sex life - try something that's a bit daring for you.
- Start planning a big adventure. The adventure will be great, but talking about it and planning it is half the fun.



# Taking Action



I hope this book has given you some ideas for making changes that will allow you to live a calmer, healthier and sexier life. While these ideas (or others you thought of while reading the book) are fresh in your mind, take some steps to make positive changes a reality. You really can make changes – starting today. Pick the idea that resonated most with you, and move forward with it. Talk with your husband, make a plan and start moving toward living the life you really want – a calmer, healthier or sexier life. And join us over at [Calm.Healthy.Sexy](http://Calm.Healthy.Sexy) for encouragement and more ideas for living the life you really want.

