

## ENSURE YOUR MARRIAGE IS A

*match made in heaven*

Every couple has good and bad times, but it's how you tackle them together that counts. Read on to learn the secrets of wedded bliss

**T**he beginning of a relationship is magical, isn't it? You're finding out new things, getting to know each other inside out. You don't care that he switches over to *Top Gear* halfway through *EastEnders*, while he'll happily spend the whole afternoon waiting outside the Topshop changing rooms for you. You're just happy to be together. Your relationship so far has been a beautiful journey and you're about to make it a permanent thing. Life couldn't be better.

But what happens when the honeymoon period is over? How can you be sure that thing he does with his teeth won't drive you mad 10 years down the line? You're two individuals, after all, with different habits, different opinions and different needs. Everyone has their own idea of what makes a marriage survive. Paul Newman, who has been married to Joanne Woodward for 49 years, credits "great impatience tempered by patience" for their longevity. "When you have been together this long, sometimes you drive each other nuts," says the screen legend, "but underneath that is some core of affection and respect." Similarly, Mrs Michael J Fox, actress Tracy Pollan, says seeing both sets of parents successfully weather tough times has strengthened her 19-year marriage. "For us it has been normal to stay together through difficulties. We grew up witnessing that firsthand."

The truth is no matter how well matched you are, every couple inevitably has their ups and downs. So what can you do to make sure your marriage stays as magical as the day you said 'I do'?

According to chartered clinical psychologist Kathleen Cox, the main issue facing married couples is change. "When faced with a major change such as the birth of a child, a house move or a

big promotion, your husband might be inclined to put his head in the sand, whereas you might be inclined to discuss things for hours on end," she says. "Different ways of dealing with change can cause a conflict: the problem doesn't lie in the change itself, but the way people deal with it"

When Janet Butler\*, 29, from Leeds, gave birth to her daughter she noticed a massive change in her marriage. "I suddenly had this little person to look after and my way of dealing with it was to shut my husband out and focus all my attention on my daughter," she says. "Because I wasn't spending as much time with him, he became quite distant. It wasn't until we had a massive row one day that I realised it was because he was feeling insecure of my feelings towards him."

So how can you prevent change from changing your marriage? "The key to overcoming conflict in situations of change lies in working as a team," says Kathleen. "It sounds simple, but you need to learn to understand how each other ticks. For example, if you're somebody who needs to analyse every minor detail, whilst your husband heads straight for the bedroom to put his head under a pillow when change hits, you need to come to some

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*Actress Tracy Pollan, married to Michael J Fox since 1988.*



sort of compromise. It can be as simple as agreeing to spend an hour talking about things and then leaving him to have his space, but you both have needs that have to be met in some way or another."

With 29 years of marriage to Don Gummer behind her, actress Meryl Streep agrees that it's all about balance. "[We try] to keep a certain balance in the relationship. We're lucky to have found each other, and we both recognise that. Our marriage and our four children and their future well-being inform all the decisions we make," she says.

So with that in mind, you're getting along fine, there's give and take, and things are running smoothly. But what happens if things are running a bit too smoothly? The last thing you want is to feel like a pair of comfy old slippers. How can you get along like a house on fire without putting out that spark that attracted you to each other in the first place?

Susan Barnwell\*, 33, from Rugby, says, "I got married in August last year and everything is blissful. The first thing my husband does when he gets home from work is to give me a massive hug and during the day he always emails me to tell me he's thinking of me. I know I shouldn't, but I worry about losing that level of closeness when we've been together for years."

According to Roy Shuttleworth, a London-based clinical psychologist specialising in marriage, this is a common worry. "There are four components that make up a happy marriage: good communication, meaning you don't hold anything back from each other and you can talk to each other about anything and everything; a good sex life, meaning as well as having similar sex drives and preferences, you have a spiritual connection that you don't find in casual sexual partners; fidelity,

