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'Stress Spillover' Could Be Ruining Your Romantic Relationship: Study

by [CHELSEA BRIMSTIN](#)

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Stress can impact many facets of your life – from your [finances](#) to your [sex life](#) – but did you know that stress can even change how you look at your partner? According to a new study published in [Social Psychological and Personality Science](#), high levels of stress might be ruining your love relationship.

The study found that married people under a lot of stress are more likely to pay attention to their partner's negative behaviour than their positive behaviour.

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“Put another way, stress may be linked not only to what individuals do, but also to what they see, in their relationship,” lead author of the study and University of Texas at Austin associate professor Lisa Neff explains, according to [HuffPost](#).

For a long time, Neff has been interested in looking at the ways that stress from other facets of your life could “spill over” into your relationship.

“When we are experiencing more stress in these life domains – work difficulties, tensions with extended family or friends, financial strains – does that affect how we behave when interacting with our relationship partner?” she asks.



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How did the 'stress spillover' study work?

Neff and co. spoke with 79 straight newlywed couples (who had been married for less than seven months) to complete a brief survey before they went to bed every day for 10 days. Researchers chose newlyweds because, “during the honeymoon period, the tendency for couples to focus on the positive and minimize the negative is especially strong,” Neff explains. Thus, the results could speak to the true power of the romantic impact of stress.

The survey was made up of a list of both positive and negative potential behaviours that participants might have encountered from their partner that day. On the questionnaire, they were asked if they'd engaged in the behaviours themselves and if they

noticed their partner engage in the behaviours. This allowed the researchers to look at a person's perception of their partner's behaviours alongside their partner's reported behaviours.

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"We found that individuals who were more stressed were more accurate in perceiving day-to-day changes in their partner's negative behaviour, compared to individuals who were less stressed and tended to overlook or underestimate their partner's negativity," Neff concludes.

While a person's stress impacted how they saw changes in their partner's negative behaviours, the study showed that it did not affect how they perceived changes in their partner's positive behaviours.

It's important to note that the study could have more accurate results with a more diverse sample size by looking at LGBTQ2S+ and relationships of varying length.

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How do you avoid letting stress effect your relationship?

According to Neff and some marriage therapists, the first thing you should do to stop stress from permeating your relationship is know your triggers. If you can recognize what will make you have a big emotional response, you can vocalize them so that your partner is aware of what might set you off.

Another tactic is to ensure you get some space for yourself to unwind and decompress from your stressful day. If, after that, you still find that your stress is having an impact on your relationship, make sure to avoid conflating your partner with your relationship problems or your other stressors.

Lastly, try to learn new techniques to manage your stress, whether that's through meditating, journaling or going to therapy to talk things out.

See also: [How to use breathing techniques to help counter a panic attack.](#)

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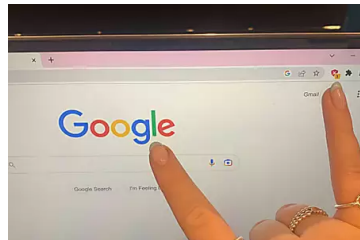
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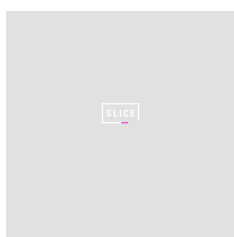


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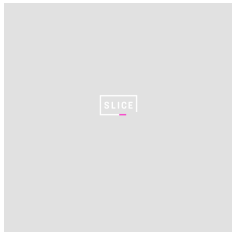
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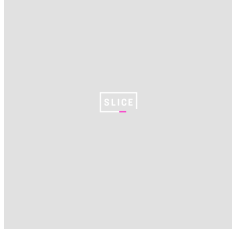
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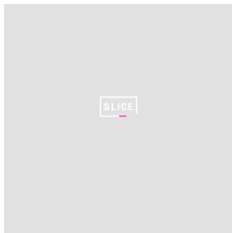
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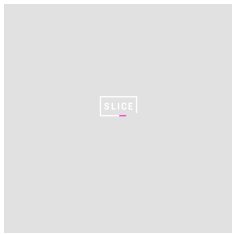
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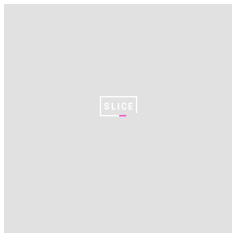
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