

## The Canary

### *Canary in the Coal Mine*

According to Time magazine, married couples in the United States have sex 54 times a year on average. The frequency of sex depends upon the age of the couple, but 54 times is the average. That is a little more than once per week. The thing that was interesting about the Time article is that the amount of sex people are having is dropping. A November 2017 study in the Archives of Sexual Behavior shows that people are having sex fewer times in the 2010s than couples had in the 2000s (9 fewer times), which was a drop from the 1990s. These declines in sexual frequency were similar across gender, race, region, educational level, and work status.

Have you ever heard how miners used canaries in coal mines? Miners took canaries, the small songbirds, into the mines with them. They used the canaries as an early warning system. Toxic gases such as carbon monoxide and methane could build up in the mines. Because the canaries were smaller than the miners, the buildup of these gases would affect the canaries first. Signs of distress from the bird told the miners that conditions in the mine were unsafe.

Think about those statistics and the decline in the frequency in which married couples have sex. Those statistics serves as a canary in the coalmine. Researchers don't yet know exactly why people are having less sex than they did in generations past, but this information is serving as an early warning system.

Research shows that sex offers benefits through both exercise and the increase of oxytocin levels. Oxytocin offers many important benefits including lowering the need for food intake. Gotta love oxytocin--isn't God amazing? He created us to be sexual creatures and then gave us lots of benefits for participating in a REALLY good time.

A 2013 Canadian study measured the health benefits of sex beyond an increased heart rate. The study was aiming to find out exactly how many calories couples burned during sex. The calorie burn was higher for men than women and was greater for both than taking a healthy walk, but not as great as jogging. The study concluded that because sex WAS exercise, it did burn calories which can result in weight loss

So, if sexual frequency can be linked to better health (a slimmer waistline, a stronger heart, a lower risk for some types of cancer), a better mood (a decrease in depression), and more intimacy between married couples, then a decrease in frequency could be a problem.

As a couple, take note of your sexual frequency. What is a normal frequency for you? (This number is a more important number than the statistic listed above). Write that number down in your Romance Journal. Now have a more difficult conversation. What frequency will be your canary in the coalmine? Determine together a frequency that might be a signal of danger in your relationship, sort of an "intimacy" thermometer.

## FOR DISCUSSION

Discuss how frequently you have sex.

Are you making love more or less often than the average number for American married couples?

Does it matter if your number is more or less than the average if you are satisfied with your number?

What frequency of sex would serve as your "canary in the coal mine?"

Determine this number together. Write your canary number in your Romance Journal.

Discuss what you will do if your frequency ever drops below your "canary number."