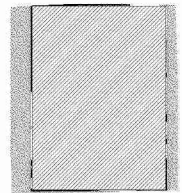
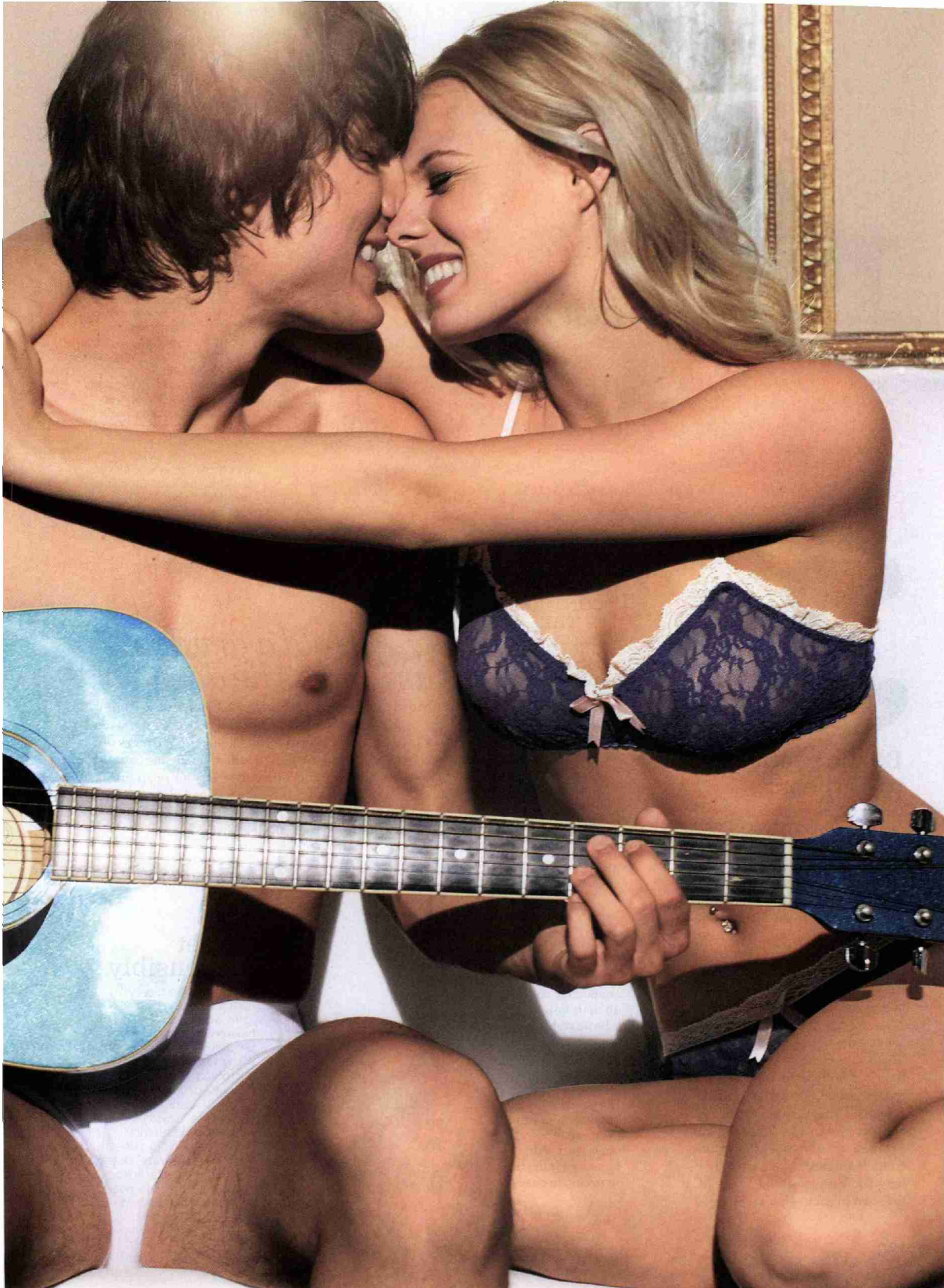


# 10 secrets of super- happy couples

THIS JUST IN FROM THE LOVE LAB:  
SURPRISINGLY QUIRKY—  
AND SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN—  
WAYS TO MAINTAIN  
A JOY-FILLED RELATIONSHIP

By Sheila Monaghan  
Photographs by Tom Corbett







# 1 Pretend you just met.

Whether you've been together for six months or six years, spend some time each day acting as if you just started dating. Ask him what he thought of that TV episode or share what you'd do if you won the lottery. "Over time, couples stop asking those exploratory, get-to-know-you questions because they think they already understand each other," says Terri Orbuch, Ph.D., author of *5 Simple Steps to Take Your Marriage from Good to Great*. But because we all continue to change and develop, little daily check-ins like this are what keep the connection growing, according to Orbuch's research of 373 pairs. Chat about something besides the daily grind—at least for a bit.

# 2 Limit the chick flicks.

If Jennifer Aniston and Ashton Kutcher regularly appear in your living room, your union could be in the danger zone. "Romantic comedies can set up unreasonable expectations, which may lead to unnecessary suffering," says Sean Patrick Hatt, Ph.D., a psychologist in Seattle. "Comparing yourselves with idealized others is a recipe for misery." Sure, rom-coms can be feel-good escapes, but they may also promote magical thinking about relationships. For example, as partnerships mature and the initial intensity tends to fade, many couples try to recapture the euphoria they had in the beginning, says Hatt. "And that sort of thinking is only reinforced by Hollywood endings," he adds. Stocking your Netflix queue? Treat the rom-coms as, well, treats.

# 3

## Be the beauty to his beast.

Coupling up with an average Joe (with a beer belly) may be the key to long-term love. According to a study in the *Journal of Family Psychology*, when men were married to more attractive women, they seemed more likely to step up to the plate, says study author Benjamin R. Karney, Ph.D., a professor of psychology at the University of California at Los Angeles. "But when husbands were better-looking, they didn't seem as engaged in helping their wives achieve their goals." (Size matters too: When women had a lower BMI than their guy, both partners tended to be more satisfied, according to other research.) The real secret to success? Support. Whether you're motivated by a gorgeous face or some other quality, couples are more likely to enjoy long-run happiness when they're invested in each other's welfare.

# 4

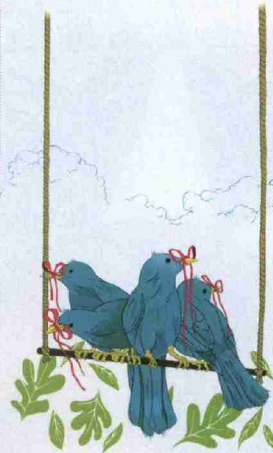
## CONTROL THE BOOZING.

Any relationship will be shaken and stirred by too much alcohol, but research suggests that young adults who drink heavily (meaning four or more drinks on one occasion for women; five or more for guys) are less likely to wed in the first place and may be at greater risk for early separation if they do. Partyers may be more likely to have commitment issues to begin with, and once they couple up their bonds may be unstable. "If you're going to be in a solid intimate partnership, you're going to need all the good judgment and compassion you can muster," says Hatt. Which means keeping the drinking in check.

# 5

## Hold a grudge (as long as he doesn't).

Provided that your partner is able to bounce back from spats, you'll experience greater satisfaction, even if you tend to stay P.O.'d, according to recent research. The mark of a good recovery: You don't allow conflicts about one issue—say, money—to spill over into other areas of your relationship, such as how you help each other after a tough day, says study author Jessica E. Salvatore, Ph.D., of the University of Minnesota. A yang to your yin yields harmony.



# 6 Tweet responsibly.

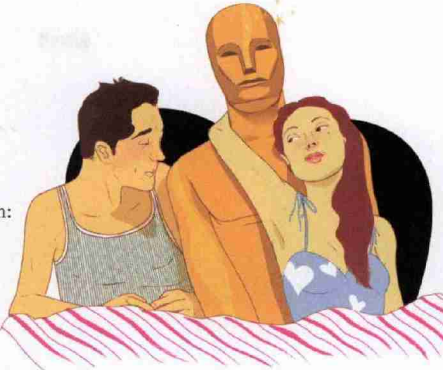
According to a survey of 100,000 people from OkCupid.com, avid tweeters tend to have shorter relationships—10 percent shorter, on average—than those who don't microblog. "Having your eyes glued to a smartphone screen isn't exactly conducive to romance," says Hatt. Be sure your tendency toward technology (tweets, texts, and otherwise) doesn't take up time better spent engaging in heart-to-heart communication with your guy.

STYLING: LIZA COLLIS; HAIR: TREVOR BOWDEN; MAKEUP: JULIE TOMLINSON FOR TIGER/BERNSTEIN & ANDRIULLI; PROOF STYLING: TARA MARRIO/BERNSTEIN & ANDRIULLI; MANICURE: SUNSHINE OUTING FOR O.P.I./ARTISTS BY NEXT; EBERLEY BRA AND PANTIES; GAP BOXERS



**Don't win an Oscar.**

That is, unless you'd like to thank the academy for ruining your relationship. A Best Actress winner is 63 percent more likely to have her marriage end before her category mates do, say researchers at Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Toronto. (And it's not an honor just to be nominated either: Sixty percent of all nominees, male or female, experience at least one divorce after getting a nod.) While the breakup rate might seem like celebrity hogwash, the findings may speak to an underlying social norm: Sudden one-sided success can put a strain on a romantic partnership. "The increased rate of divorce may be due to a husband's discomfort with his wife's success," says study author Colleen Stuart, Ph.D. "On the other hand, the wife may grow dissatisfied with her current marital arrangement because she now has the confidence and opportunity to move away from a bad relationship." Try to remain a power couple: Encourage and celebrate each other's successes, big and small.



10

9

**NURTURE YOUR FRIENDS' RELATIONSHIPS.**

You might divorce-proof your own. According to researchers, the breakup of a close pal's marriage increases your odds of splitting by as much as 75 percent. "Some people may see another's divorce as permission to change their own life," says study coauthor Rose McDermott, Ph.D. But when you encourage friends to stay together (happily), you may generate reasons that also apply to your bond.

*Twist the sheets at least once a week.*

The average American gets busy about two or three times a month, but increasing your romps to once a week generates as much bliss as scoring an extra \$50,000 in income, according to researchers from Dartmouth College and the University of Warwick in England. It's not so much the sex itself that leads to happiness; the frequency is a better marker for a successful relationship. "Couples who like each other end up in bed more often," says study author Andrew J. Oswald, Ph.D. "And it's the liking-each-other part that increases joy." But seriously, who needs a reason? Bank on more booty. ■

8

**BURN BRAS (TOGETHER).**

Forget flowers—feminism is the new romance, say experts at Rutgers University in New Jersey. Women whose male partner is a feminist report better relationship quality, while men with feminist partners experience more sexual satisfaction and relationship stability. "A male feminist partner may increase a woman's ability to realize her own goals and career ambitions," says study author Laurie Rudman, Ph.D. "And male feminists are probably not threatened by their partner's strivings." Plus, these women may be more likely to initiate sex, and no guy will complain about that.