

Preventing Marital Cavities: The Case for Relationship Check-Ins and Check-Ups

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“*We need to talk...*” may be one of the most feared phrases in any relationship. Yet these sometimes awkward and difficult conversations are good medicine for our long-term relationship health . . . and even physical health. Dr. James Córdoba, an esteemed relationship researcher at Clark University, has found that when we are stressed in relationships, we are more likely to [get sick and we even age faster!](#) If we want to take better care of our health, we should start taking better care of our relationships. Which translates into talking. In fact, Dr. Córdoba urges us to regularly schedule these relationship talks, not just wait for them to happen in a stressed moment.

In a [2014 study](#) of couples at risk for serious relationship problems, Dr Córdoba and his research colleagues found that regular marriage “check-ups” not only can lead to a healthier relationship in the short-term, but also could help prevent problems from arising in the future and were linked to long-term healthy relationship outcomes. “Access to regular MCs [Marriage Checkups], these researchers

claim, “can help individuals keep their marriages and long-term relationships healthy for a lifetime, *just as regular dental checkups make it possible for most of us to keep healthy and whole teeth for a lifetime.*” Dr. Córdoba recently presented his research findings at the [Utah Association for Marriage and Family Therapy](#) conference in Logan, Utah.

But what is a “marriage check-in” or “check-up” and how can a couple do it? Smart question. It turns out there are several different ways. If you are a do-it-yourself kind of person, just begin by asking each other some questions like, “What am I doing now that you like?” or “How is our friendship, and what’s something specific I can do this week to help you feel loved or supported?” Here is a past [Stronger Marriage](#) blog with more [simple questions](#) to ask in your personal relationship check-up.

Dr. John Gottman, a noted marriage researcher, in his popular book *The Seven Principles of Making Marriage Work*, argues that these check-ins don’t have to focus on any big problems. They can simply be intentional time [asking each other questions](#) to deepen what he calls your “love maps” – how well you know and understand each other in both the big a little things of life.

For more formal and detailed check-ups, researchers have created relationship surveys or questionnaires that you can take to analyze your relationship, and then get feedback at the end. The Utah Marriage Commission offers the detailed [online RELATE assessment](#) (free for Utah residents) that you can take which gives you instant feedback on where the strengths and weaknesses are in your relationship. Then couples can decide to work on some specific weaknesses. And some couples even take their check-up results and ask a marriage coach or counselor to help them work on some specific things that they want to change. Marriage counselors *love* working with couples who are proactively working to strengthen their relationship and prevent future problems, rather than dealing with a marital crisis that is threatening the future of their marriage.

“*We need to talk*” don’t have to be such scary words. Ironically, when you are regularly checking in to talk about your relationship, you are much less likely to hear those four frightening words spoken by your spouse or partner in frustration. Again, think oral health: regular brushing and flossing now to prevent cavities means less painful dental work and oral surgery down the road. Similarly, *prevent those marital cavities with regular relationship check-ins and check-ups that keep your relationship fresh and sparkling!*

Ian Lake was the primary author of this blog.