

Nag, Nag, Nag

Adapted from Beth Wolfensberger Singer in *Health*, April 2000; Vol. 14, #3, pp. 84-88

Beth quit nagging. She used to be a nag. "Nagging, in fact, may be one of a wife's chief duties." Married men live longer than single men in part because sometimes their wives nag them to eat right and drive sanely. But she quit because nagging made her feel crummy and it was ineffective.

Men do stuff, like leave a pop can anywhere but the recycling bin. Women notice and complain. He feels criticized and rebels. She repeats her complaint, louder. The spiral gets so bad that if he does something nice, she wonders what his ulterior motive might be. He can't get back in her good graces. Wives want to matter, to feel heard and taken seriously. Husbands dread, "There's no way I can please her."

To stop this deadly dance, try the following strategies:

1. The *Diluted Nag*. Before nagging your husband, use a lifeline, call a friend and vent. It'll dilute your anger 90% and you can ask your husband nicely.
2. The *Action nag*. Remember the huge waste of time warning your kids you were going to count to 3? Words go in one ear of your husband and out the other. Don't beg him again to do the chore, grab the tools in one hand and his in the other, then walk in there and flirt with him while he does it. Or write your requests: leave Post-It notes, send him e-mail; use blood (just kidding!).
3. The *Lovey-Dovey Nag*. A catch-22: in order to desire sex, wife needs husband to be attentive; yet to be attentive to wife, husband needs to feel sexually fulfilled. Nike says, **Just do it!** Make love, not war, to a man you'd like to swat often achieves results (and spices up your sex life to boot). Manipulative, granted, but rare is the husband who minds.
4. The *Three-Step Nag*. First step: say what you do want. "You never show me that you love me;" that's not enough information and is only what you don't want. "This is what I want and this will show me that you love me." Second step: catch him doing things right. Praise him even if you never expect reciprocal thanks for doing the same tasks. Third step: watch your mouth. Not "You never..." Instead, "I'd really like it if you would..." Be specific. Ask for baby steps first. When he does it, cue grateful kudos.
5. The *Question Nag*. Ask about what really bakes your potato in a genuinely curious and non-snide way. "Is there some reason you aren't getting the car inspected? Is there something I need to understand?" Or, even more revelation: "Look, I find myself wanting to scream and do all kinds of nutty things. What's going on?"

The nag can be a means for a wife to bid for connection with her husband. He can become more sensitive to her approach and she can become more sensitive in making her needs known in a non-threatening way.

