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Annoying habit break relationship

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HONG KONG: Some irritating little habits however trivial they seem can be fatally annoying and can eventually cause distraction and make a relationship crumble and crack.

It might be the way he leaves the cap off the tube of toothpaste. It might be the way she takes too much luggage. It might be the way he addresses her in babyish terms in public. It might be the way she fidgets with her hair.

Scientists have researched just how damaging these little habits can be in some relationships, saying if left repeated constantly they can cause a reaction similar to a physical allergy in the partner on the receiving end.

In a study published by the US journal *Personal Relationships*, researchers claimed the emotional response triggered by annoying habits increases in intensity the more and more they are repeated.

The study, carried out by psychologists at the University of Louisville in Kentucky and funded by the US government, found that couples who reported higher numbers of bad habits among their partners were less likely to stay together...

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According to Michael Cunningham, one of the psychology professors who led the research, the so-called "social behaviour that stirs negative emotions are like a pebble in your shoe or poison ivy.

"The first experience with a physical allergen, such as poison ivy, is likely to produce a small negative reaction, but with repeated contact the sensitivity tends to increase and the negative reaction becomes stronger," he said.

"The same repetition sensitivity response appears to occur in emotional reactions following a partner's unpleasant behaviour."

Cunningham says the increased insensitivity occurs because the annoyance at the act is added to the annoyance of repetition, the memory of past, similar behaviour.

The study, entitled "Social Allergies in Romantic Relationships", is part of Cunningham's ongoing research on "romanticisation" process during which relationships change from that first flush of exciting new love to the steady, less exciting type...

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"The closeness and familiarity of a romantic relationship can create a range of emotions from contentment to contempt. The process of learning about the partner's hopes and dreams, and exchanging support, kindness and affection, can lead to commitment. But the process of going backstage and learning everything there is to know about the other person can also lead to some undesirable surprises."

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The study questioned 137 dating couples about their partners' behaviour, the frequency of certain bad habits and the response they triggered.

Researchers met the couples a year later and discovered that couples who reported a greater frequency of annoying habits and a greater intensity of negative emotions were less likely to still be together.

How much these acts contributed to the end of a relationship was questionable. Hong Kong-based relationship coach Glick agrees that most couples' annoyances only emerge after the honeymoon phase of their relationship has ended.

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However, Glick points out that in her experience they only become a problem when the relationship is in trouble.

"There are several stages of love. At the absolute maximum, the honeymoon period lasts three years. The honeymoon period is the time when couples are most likely to get together."

relationship is when you have growing careers and growing families and that's when life can be stressful," she said

"People say that women let themselves go. But couples let themselves go in terms of their personal manners and feel comfortable with someone, if you love and care about someone and they treat you well, you can overlook this and the social faux pas."

"But if you feel unloved, unappreciated, unacknowledged, the anger that causes puts various things in focus. When negative, the things that annoy can become magnified. You pick up on nasty habits and if they continue they are annoying."

So what should you do? According to Cunningham, what you shouldn't do is to laugh or ignore a partner's all that he calls "backstage behaviour", no matter how trivial it may seem.

"If one person regards something as annoying even if the other regards it as trivial, then it is serious enough that they should discuss and work out," he said.

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