

Is your relationship making you **SICK**?

If you feel as if you're in a constant state of conflict and chaos, and arguing has become the easiest way to communicate, you could be in a toxic relationship. So, who's to blame?

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How did you sleep last night? Did you toss and turn, unable to sleep just thinking about a close relationship that isn't working? Or maybe you dreaded going to work this morning because your boss belittles you in front of coworkers. Or a girlfriend drains you with endless complaints but hardly notices that you

find out if it's toxic

If something is interfering with trust, communication or accountability in a relationship you have, it may be toxic. Take a look at the physical and emotional clues, says Debbie Mandel, a stress management specialist, radio show host and author of *Turn On Your Inner Light*.

- remembering any of your personal concerns
- You feel your self-confidence has been chipped away by his or her sarcastic remarks

fix it

If you've checked off a majority of clues, you may be involved in a toxic relationship. Find out how to handle the stress that comes along with it.

You don't have to stay in a toxic relationship. For some, finding a new job, leaving a partner or ditching a best friend is the healthiest thing to do.

have problems too. Or your family is barraging you with disappointments about your lifestyle. Well, maybe it's not you. You could be in a toxic relationship.

With this type of relationship the interaction itself is the illness, says Dr. Michael First, an associate professor of clinical psychiatry at Columbia University. "[Unlike] other disorders where the dysfunction occurs within an individual, in relational disorders the dysfunction is in the relationship itself, not the person." He also says that people should speak with a therapist to find out whether the relationship is unhealthy or if it's the individual within the relationship.

CHECK ALL THAT APPLY TO YOU AND YOUR RELATIONSHIP

- You feel drained whenever you interact with the other person
- You fill up on junk food, especially under stress from the relationship
- You feel bad, whether it's from a headache, a bad taste in your mouth, or a queasy stomach each time you come in contact with the person or situation
- You feel the other person monopolizes your time
- You feel he or she is narcissistic, only concerned with what you can do for them, inconsiderate, calling you late at night and never asking or

WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

If a relationship with friends and family brings you down, it's time to reconsider your options for your overall health. When it comes to personal relationships, Mandel says it is important with family members where there is more daily contact to know what makes you uncomfortable, and be aware of what you're feeling and thinking. "Make sure you have alone time and personal space daily to fortify yourself," she says. And if talking openly about your relationship doesn't work and conflicts continue, find a good therapist for family counseling.

"Sometimes you have to let go of a negative relationship, particularly if your health is affected - physically or emotionally," says Mandel. But if you can't, she suggests you approach

the person to discuss the problem. Come prepared with an anecdote or magazine article that might help explain the problem in order to minimize confrontations, fights and power-struggles. If you're in a toxic relationship with someone you have known for many years, slowly end the relationship. "Gradually wean the two of you off one another," says Mandel. "Speak less frequently on the phone, meet less often and if you must meet,

Missouri-Columbia, found ways people distance themselves from toxic coworkers include not asking personal questions, joking or having lighthearted conversations – basically, avoiding spending unnecessary time with the individual. Control your personal space and remain removed from office gossip, complaints about bosses and upper management by excusing yourself and leaving the area.

If your stressed-out boss has you

So you fight with your man, hate your parents and cringe at the sight of your boss – does that mean the relationship is in jeopardy? Who's to blame for the problem? You, the other person or the relationship?

make it in a group setting with others, not alone, so you can position yourself next to someone else in the group."

WITH COWORKERS AND BOSSES

If you find yourself calling in sick several times a month, something is wrong. A toxic relationship at work can literally make you ill. Before you consider quitting your job, take steps to ward off toxic interactions. The study

"Nonvoluntary Relationships with Disliked Partners," by the University of

Alabama at Birmingham clinical psychologist Dr. Joshua Klapow, suggests breathing exercises and taking some time to yourself.

WITH YOUR PARTNER

If you're unhappy in your intimate relationship, chances are your partner is too. A study done by the American Psychological Association found that one spouse's level of anxiety and depression predicted not only her own marital satisfaction but his as well.

So what do you do? Express your feelings honestly and try not to vent. "Explain what is wrong and listen," says Mandel. "See if you can salvage the relationship by clearing the air. Adopt a wait-and-see attitude." Couples should seek counseling together to remedy the dysfunction.

WE ALL NEED SOMEBODY

Imagine if you had no relationships. Life would be easy. No negotiating housework duties, forget unreasonable boss requests, no listening to a bragging friend, and no ugly family holiday scenes. Though it might sound

7 TIPS TO RELATIONSHIP DETOX

1. Establish clear boundaries – don't allow anyone to call you in the middle of the night.
2. Don't waste your energy stressing. Excuse yourself and leave the room, or center yourself by breathing deeply. Inhale for two counts and exhale four counts.
3. Honestly assert your needs without aggression. You don't need to be accommodating at your personal expense.
4. Break eye contact, which will break the person's hold on you.
5. If you're dealing with a "No" person, whether it's a boss or your mother, offer them options before you turn away their ideas.
6. Keep yourself healthy and balanced with proper eating habits and regular exercise.
7. Cut them some slack – reinterpret the situation with compassion and then move on. This way you won't be drained.

good, we humans thrive on bonding with others despite relationship complexities. Even if you swore off men, told your mom to butt out and quit your job, you'd still crave intimacy. It's only human. Just don't continue relationships to the detriment of your physical and mental health. ■

