

Study: Couples who delay having sex get benefits later

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While there are still couples who wait for a deep level of commitment before having sex, today it's far more common for two people to explore their sexual compatibility before making long-term plans together.

So does either method lead to better marriages?

A new study in the American Psychological Association's *Journal of Family Psychology* sides with a delayed approach.

The study involves 2,035 married individuals who participated in a popular online marital assessment called "RELATE." From the assessment's database, researchers selected a sample designed to match the [demographics](#) of the married American population. The extensive questionnaire includes the question "When did you become sexual in this relationship?"

A [statistical analysis](#) showed the following benefits enjoyed by couples who waited until [marriage](#) compared to those who started having sex in the early part of their relationship:

- Relationship stability was rated 22 percent higher
- [Relationship satisfaction](#) was rated 20 percent higher
- Sexual quality of the relationship was rated 15 percent better

- Communication was rated 12 percent better

For couples in between – those that became sexually involved later in the relationship but prior to marriage – the benefits were about half as strong.

"Most research on the topic is focused on individuals' experiences and not the timing within a relationship," said lead study author Dean Busby, a professor in Brigham Young University's School of Family Life.

"There's more to a relationship than sex, but we did find that those who waited longer were happier with the sexual aspect of their relationship," Busby added. "I think it's because they've learned to talk and have the skills to work with issues that come up."

Sociologist Mark Regnerus of the University of Texas at Austin, who was not involved with this research, read the study and shared his take on the findings.

"Couples who hit the honeymoon too early – that is, prioritize sex promptly at the outset of a relationship – often find their relationships underdeveloped when it comes to the qualities that make relationships stable and spouses reliable and trustworthy," said Regnerus, author of Premarital [Sex](#) in America, a book forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Because religious belief often plays a role for couples who choose to wait, Busby and his co-authors controlled for the influence of religious involvement in their analysis.

"Regardless of religiosity, waiting helps the relationship form better communication processes, and these help improve long-term stability

and relationship satisfaction," Busby said.

Provided by Brigham Young University

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