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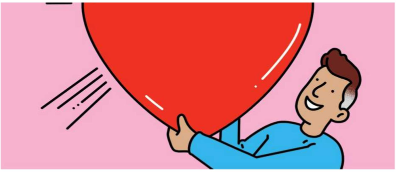
25 Great Ways to Show Your Love

Prove to your partner that your heart is in the right place

By Matt Alderton, AARP | 4



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Couples engaged in romantic courtship experience less stress, more happiness and even longer lives, studies have shown. That's because love creates spikes in so-called "happiness hormones" like dopamine and oxytocin, which are responsible for feelings of passion, pleasure and attachment. Simply put: Love is a chemical reaction. But that doesn't mean it's automatic. Even with biology on your side, love takes work. With that in mind, we've curated 25 ideas to help you show your partner that you care. **When you're done reading them, please share your own lovestruck suggestions in the comments section at the bottom of the page.**

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1. Buy a bouquet

The Society of American Florists says that 65 percent of Americans feel special when receiving flowers, and that receiving flowers makes 80 percent of Americans feel happy. If your flower game has wilted, there are lots of ways to make it feel fresh again, according to Gregory Godek, author of more than a dozen best-selling books about love and romance. "Don't buy roses," he advises in his book *1001 Ways to Be Romantic*. "It's common, expected and expensive. Buy different flowers. Flowers in her favorite color. Flowers that match his eyes. Flowers that send a message. Flamboyant flowers. Tiny, delicate flowers. Lots and lots of flowers." You could buy flowers that begin with the first letter of their name, or a single flower instead of an arrangement — for example, a sunflower with a note that says, "You are the sunshine of my life."

2. Pen a love letter

Love letters are timeless tokens of affection — and you don't have to be a poet to write one. All you have to do is share in a sincere way how you feel about your partner. "So many of our relational interactions take place online. A loving text can feel great to receive, but ... a note is more tangible, evoking a more potent response," says Alexandra Solomon, a licensed clinical psychologist, relationship therapist and author of *Love Every Day*, a book in which she shares 365 daily practices to help people improve their relationships. And you can get creative. Godek suggests slipping a love note into the book your partner is reading or into their suitcase when they're traveling. Or you could write messages on sticky notes that you place throughout the house, he says.

3. Ask them out on a date

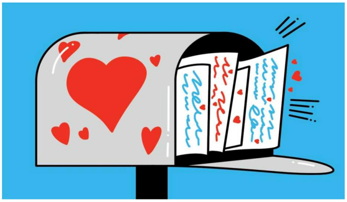
No matter how long they've been together, it's important that couples keep "dating," according to Godek. "Don't just go out to a movie on Saturday, like always. Call her from work on Wednesday and formally ask her out on a date," he says. For a really special outing, consider re-creating your first date. "Revisiting the place where you first met or went on a date can help you recapture some of that old magic, while the years you've spent together since then can add a new richness and depth to the experience," says Barbie Adler, founder and president of Selective Search, a Chicago-based luxury matchmaking firm. "These kinds of dates can be a powerful opportunity to reflect and reminisce on the past, find joy and companionship in the present, and reaffirm your excitement for the future."

4. Hold their hand

When it comes to physical intimacy, making love and showing love sometimes hit differently. So if you want to show your partner how much you care, consider getting back to basics. “Hold [his or her] hand and be sure to get in some extra hugs this winter. Human touch releases oxytocin, the love hormone, and instantly makes us feel connected,” says Susan Magsamen, coauthor with Ivy Ross of *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us*. Indeed, a 2020 study in the journal *Adaptive Human Behavior and Physiology* found that physical contact from loved ones reduces feelings of loneliness, and even reduces one’s heart rate — a sign of physiological well-being, according to researchers.

5. Send a card — or better yet, lots of cards

A greeting card is a simple way to let your partner know how much you appreciate them. But you can make even simple gestures feel special, according to Godek, who suggests making a giant greeting card out of a cardboard box, mailing a card to your partner at work, or giving your partner a card every day for an entire week or month. And don’t just wait for birthdays or holidays. “Go out this weekend and buy $50 worth of greeting cards,” Godek advises. “Get some sentimental cards. Get some sexy cards. Get several birthday cards. Get some friendship cards. Get cards with no inscription, so you can exercise your creativity.” And speaking of birthday cards: “How about doing something different this year? On your lover’s birthday, send a ‘thank you’ card to his or her mother,” Godek suggests.



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6. Give thanks

If an apple a day keeps the doctor away, then a thank-you a day keeps the divorce lawyer away, suggests Gary Brown, a licensed marriage and family therapist. “I try to thank [my wife] at least two or three times a day,” he says. “It doesn’t have to be a big thing. It’s, ‘Hey sweetheart, thank you for that meal last night.’ It’s, ‘Thank you for the roses in the garden; I cut a couple and put them in the office.’ It’s, ‘Thank you for taking in my dry cleaning’ … It could be any number of things. The little things she does for me are her way of showing love, and thanking her is my way of expressing gratitude.” Echoes relationship coach Laura Doyle, author of *The Empowered Wife: Six Surprising Secrets for Attracting Your Husband’s Time, Attention, and Affection*: “One of my favorite ways to show my husband love is to make a gratitude list for the ways he makes me happy, from doing the laundry, putting up holiday decorations, being a great provider and taking me to sushi. I like to put a list of 10 things on a homemade card with silly drawings. He seems to love it.”

7. Anticipate their needs

Romance doesn’t always have to be passionate. Often, it can be practical. If you’re doing laundry and notice that all your partner’s socks have holes in them, buy some new ones. If you see that their favorite cereal is running low, pick up a fresh box while you’re out running errands. Another example: Bring them a cup of tea while they’re working on the computer, or a glass of water to make sure they stay hydrated. “This shows your partner that you’re thinking about their needs and well-being,” says Jodie Milton, a relationship and intimacy coach and cofounder of Practical Intimacy, which provides relationship and intimacy coaching. “It’s a small act of thoughtfulness that will make them feel cared for and maybe even a little bit more energized.”

8. Tag along to appointments

Doctors and dentists are neither fun nor romantic. But when couples stomach important appointments together as a team, it can strengthen the relationship bond while providing opportunities to catch up. “Going along for routine check-ups gives you opportunities for quickie coffee dates. And accompanying him or her when there are difficult problems allows you to provide emotional support,” Godek says.

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9. Memorize them

Your partner is like a book: Memorizing their favorite passages and regularly reciting them is a great way to demonstrate that you're a fan. "Do you know your partner well enough to make a perfect cup of coffee for him or her? How much cream and sugar?" Godek asks. Or how about your partner's go-to comfort food? What about their favorite color, movie or song? Do you know their favorite fast-food restaurant, and what they order there? What about their shoe size? "Know all of your partner's sizes," Godek continues. "You should be able to buy any item of clothing for him or her, and have it fit 80 percent of the time."

10. Make a grand gesture

Do you remember when Jim made Pam a video montage of their love story in the sitcom *The Office*? How about that episode of *Friends* when Monica proposed to Chandler in a candlelit apartment? And who could forget the classic scene from *Say Anything*, when Lloyd stands outside Diane's window with a giant boom box playing Peter Gabriel's *In Your Eyes*? Take inspiration from your favorite on-screen romances, but put your own spin on things. "Wouldn't it be a shame to look back on your life and not be able to say that you did one incredible, unbelievable, outrageous and wonderful thing for and with your lover?" Godek asks.

Welcome Home

ILLUSTRATION: SAM ISLAND

11. Praise them in public

A compliment can make a partner feel loved. If you really want to make someone feel special, though, consider giving one in public, Godek suggests. "Do you praise her in public? When's the last time you told someone else how lucky you feel to have this woman in your life? Complimenting her in front of someone else will make her feel extra special," he says. What's true of a compliment is also true of a kiss. "Are you out of the habit of showing affection for your partner in public?" Godek continues. "Hold hands. Rest your hand on his shoulder. Entwine your arm with hers."

12. Share a meal — or cook one

Romantic couples who eat together are more likely to report relationship bliss, according to a 2019 study by researchers at the United Kingdom's Marriage Foundation who analyzed data from more than 7,600 people participating in the Economic and Social Research Council's United Kingdom Time Use Survey. Among both married and cohabiting couples, those who ate together were 15 percent more likely to say they were happiest with their relationship than those who ate apart. "Sharing a meal is a universal, historical, relationship-building experience," Solomon says. "There's something bonding about pairing eye contact, conversation and the sensory delight of delicious food." Even more romantic than eating a meal with your partner is cooking one for them. "When you take the time to prepare your loved one's favorite food … you are conveying, 'I want to connect with you in a way that I know you will find pleasurable,'" Solomon adds.

13. Picture it

In 2022, researchers found that married individuals who viewed pictures of their spouse reported increased infatuation, attachment and marital satisfaction. Godek suggests: Spend a date night looking at photos together; create a gallery wall in your home displaying your favorite photos of each other; carry a photo of your partner in your wallet; and, of course, display a photo of him or her on your desk. Milton also suggests texting your partner photos from cherished times you spend together. "This shows your partner that you value your time together and that you think about them when they're not around."

14. Pass the bird test

The bird test is trending on the social media platform TikTok. The premise is simple: Look out the window and comment on a bird, then see what your partner does. If they stop what they're doing to see what you see, test-givers purport, that means your relationship is healthy. If they ignore you, however, there could be trouble in paradise. "The bird test is really a request to engage," Brown says. "It's a way to get a sense of whether or not the person wants to connect, and whether they're interested in your happiness." Echoes clinical psychologist and couples therapist Tracy Dalgleish, author of *I Didn't Sign Up for This*, in which she shares anecdotes and advice to help couples get "unstuck" in their relationships: "A bid for connection is any verbal or nonverbal attempt to connect. … Showing love means learning to see these bids and respond to them with curiosity, openness and kindness."

15. Show interest in their interests

It's one thing to show interest when your partner sees a pretty bird outside. It's quite another thing to show interest in the sports he never stops talking about, or the reality TV show that she can't stop watching. Still, it's important that you try. Doing so shows that you care, says executive life coach Tracy Fox, author of *Happy Marriage Handbook: A 10-Step Solution to Happily Ever After*. "If I'm in a relationship with you, and you love golf, how is it going to make you feel if I say, 'I hate golf and I'm never going to the golf course with you'? If you care about golf, I need to learn to care about golf," Fox says. "Does that mean I'm going out every week for 18 holes? No. What it does mean is: You love golf, and I love you, so I'm willing to meet you for the last three holes, and I'll get myself a nice cocktail and drive around in the cart because it makes me happy making you happy."

16. Take out the trash

There's a reason that so many couples fight over household chores: When you ignore your basic responsibilities, it can feel to your partner like you're also ignoring them. "Managing the household together is an area that causes a lot of conflict in relationships. Studies show that couples who share the responsibility equally are happier, more satisfied and have a more regular, fulfilling sex life," Milton says. "By being proactive with household duties, you show your partner that you respect them and their contributions to your life. Doing a task that no one enjoys — such as taking out the trash — is a small but meaningful gesture of self-sacrifice and collaboration."

ILLUSTRATION: SAM ISLAND

17. Listen up, then follow up

If you want to show your love, be more observant, and then take action, says Rachel Wilkerson Miller, editor in chief of *SELF* magazine and author of *The Art of Showing Up: How to Be There for Yourself and Your People*. "One of the key aspects of 'showing up' is noticing. It's paying attention … and then reacting and taking action," Miller says. "That starts with observing and listening, and then making a note, whether that's literally writing it down in your phone or in your planner or just storing it away mentally. For example, a romantic partner might say, 'I'd love to check out this exhibit at this museum,' or, 'I'd love to try this new restaurant.' Or maybe they're really interested in a particular item you see when you're out shopping together. It's about noticing those things and finding a way to act on them later, like planning a date to that museum exhibit. … It just feels so nice to know that your partner is listening to you and making a point to prioritize the things that interest you."

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18. Create a relationship playlist

"Back in the day, a mixtape was my love language. I made them for my friends, my siblings and my boyfriend," says Solomon, who recommends capturing your love in audio form by making a playlist on your favorite streaming music platform. Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora, YouTube Music and Amazon Music all allow you to make your own digital playlists. "Pulling together a list of songs that captures the history of your relationship … is a wonderful way to say, 'I love you,'" says Solomon. Adler agrees, and recommends making the playlist the centerpiece of a musical date night. "Having a music-themed date night can be a deeply intimate and romantic experience," she says. "Depending on the type of music you like, you could dance together or eat dinner with the music in the background, or cozy up on the couch and listen together for a deeply moving experience."

19. Put down your phone

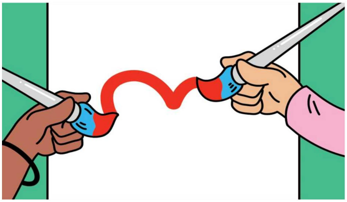
In a world where time is often the greatest commodity, the best gift you can give a partner might be your undivided attention. According to Fox, "My number one tip for any relationship is: You've got to be available." For many couples, that means putting down the phone. "I go out to dinner a lot. All I see now is people staring at their phones. They're not even talking to each other," Fox continues. "People are not connecting. You have to put down the phone in order to be available."

20. Be vulnerable

Vulnerability is the foundation of true love, according to Brown. "Without vulnerability, we just can't have connection," he says. Being vulnerable is the ultimate expression of love, he proposes, because it demonstrates trust — it shows your partner that they make you feel safe — and courage: You're willing to risk your emotional safety by expressing uncomfortable feelings like shame, guilt or embarrassment. But what does vulnerability look like, exactly? "I could talk about what I did today, but that isn't necessarily me being vulnerable," Brown says. "If I'm talking about what my experience of what I did today was, and how it made me think or feel, or how it impacted me, that is vulnerability."

21. Make art together

According to a 2019 study of 20 couples published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, when couples took a painting class together, their bodies released increased levels of the "love hormone" oxytocin. The effect was especially strong in men, who released as much as 2½ times more oxytocin when creating art with their partner.



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22. Greet them (enthusiastically)

Dog owners often say one of the best things about having a pet is coming home to them, because their dogs are always unabashedly excited to see them. It makes you wonder: Why can't humans be that way? Fox thinks they can be. "I'm a big believer in going to people and not having them come to you," she says. "I'm a coach, and people say to me all the time, 'I come home, I open the front door and no one even acknowledges me. … If someone would just get up and greet me at the door — give me a hug when I come in — it would mean so much.' There's something about stopping what you're doing and physically going to people. It shows them: Hey, I'm going to make the effort because I care about you."

23. Apologize often — and forgive quickly

When you falter in a relationship, it's important to acknowledge it so that you can move past it, suggests Susan McCarthy, coauthor of *Sorry, Sorry, Sorry: The Case for Good Apologies*, a book about the art of apologizing. "A careful apology to your loved one can be a powerful way to show love. It demonstrates respect for their feelings, and proves your wish to act well toward them," McCarthy says. "A good apology uses 'apologize' or 'sorry' and is specific about what it's an apology for. … It shows you understand the impact of what happened. It doesn't make excuses or complaints. And it says you won't do it again." It's just as important to accept apologies as it is to give them, according to Fox, who says grudges keep relationships from growing. "The reason great athletes are great athletes is not just because they're really good at the job. It's also because when they make a mistake, they get back in the game," she explains. "That's what you have to do when you're in a romantic relationship. You have to get back in the game. That means forgiving people, and forgiving people quickly."

24. Give them space

As children, people develop certain "attachment styles" with their caregivers that they later carry into their adult relationships, suggests psychiatrist Amir Levine, coauthor of *Attached: The New Science of Adult Attachment and How It Can Help You Find — and Keep — Love*. If your partner has a "secure" attachment style, he says, they're comfortable with intimacy and affection, and usually confident in their relationships. If they have an "anxious" attachment style, they fear abandonment and need constant reassurance. Finally, if they have an "avoidant" attachment style, they equate closeness with loss of personal freedom and therefore have a tendency to minimize intimacy. When you understand your partner's attachment style, it's easier to make them feel loved, according to Levine, who notes that romance for avoidant partners can be especially challenging to navigate. "You show them love by giving them space because that's what they need," he says. "You have to understand that it's not personal. It's not that they want space from you. They just need more space, period."

25. Put your own oxygen mask on first

What they tell you to do on airplanes — put on your own oxygen mask before helping others — is also good advice for relationships, according to Miller, who says the best way to show love to a partner sometimes is showing love to yourself. "In romantic relationships, a lot of tension is often rooted in things that we need to work on as individuals. … We sometimes want our partner to just inherently know that we need a specific kind of support. If you're not good at communicating that, or at getting to the root of what's really bothering you, a good way to show up for your partner is to work on that," explains Miller, who says self-care and self-work can manifest in myriad ways, like going to therapy, drinking less alcohol or developing other friendships so your partner doesn't have to be your sole source of emotional support. "If you're right with yourself, it's going to help your relationship."

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Matt Alderton has written about everything from classic cars and climate change to farming robots and fighter jets for publications such as USA Today, The Washington Post *and* Forbes. *Originally from Denver, which boasts 300 days of sunshine a year, he now resides in Chicago, which boasts three. You can reach him on his website, MattAlderton.com.*

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