

How to Make a Man Commit

Chemistry causes him to fall in the first place. But keeping him mad about you for years and years to come? Trickier to deduce. We interviewed love experts as well as real guys and discovered six traits that will have him aching to stay serious with you.

BY STEPHANIE BOOTH

You meet a guy you like, you feel sparks, and he clearly feels them too. After dating for a while, things start to get more intense. All great! But now that you've found someone with whom you really click—someone who surpasses your boyfriend wish list and has what you crave to make the relationship go the distance—the challenge is figuring out what he needs to fully commit. The truth is, you don't want to invest a ton of time and emotional energy into the relationship only to have him turn to you one day and say, "You know what? This isn't working for me anymore."

"The beginning stages of dating are driven by chemistry, but you can't rely on that alone to sustain things," says Karen Sherman, PhD, coauthor of *Marriage Magic! Find It, Keep It, and Make It Last*. "Other factors need to be in place to carry your commitment for the long haul."

In other words, the characteristics that capture a guy's interest initially aren't the same ones that matter most to him once he's thinking LTR...or even marriage. So what is important? Well, it's hard as hell to figure out because no dude is going to outright articulate what he needs from you to be happy. That's why we did some investigating. What we learned: the mix of qualities that will make him want to hold on to you.

You're Always Game

Men want someone fun—plain and simple. "The male mind isn't organized like women's minds are," Sherman says. "They don't spend time analyzing nuances; to them, things are black and white." Meaning, you're either a blast to be with or you're not. Our advice: Fall into the first category, like by playing hooky from work together or suggesting you two enter a chili cook-off.

There's actually a physiological reason being up for a good time is essential. Men get bored more quickly than women do. "Their brains produce less dopamine—a neurotransmitter that triggers contentment," Sherman explains. "So instead of feeling satiated after a great experience, they crave further stimulation." To be happy, guys need to try new things. Women who are spontaneous and live to the fullest tap in to that primal need.

This is something men particularly desire as the relationship progresses. In the early stages, even just hanging out together casually feels unfamiliar and, thus, exciting. But over time, you need to keep the momentum going, and many women forget about that, especially these days, when the role of females is experiencing such a seismic shift.

Increasingly career-minded and successful, we're holding a larger share of both high school diplomas and advanced degrees, and a growing number of us are the primary breadwinners. It's awesome that we're on such a roll, yet one outcome of this trend is that letting loose is probably not exactly at the top of your to-do list, Sherman points out. And that's making guys long for a sig other who not only kicks ass at work but also totally unwinds and does stuff simply for the thrill of it.

You Work Your Look

You've heard it a kazillion times: Men are visual creatures. So it's a no-brainer that looks count. But it's not just important in the beginning of a relationship. Even after you have been coupled up for a while and are supercomfortable together, he really doesn't want to see you in sweatpants three nights in a row.

The reason dudes are so optically oriented is that a male brain's "sex processor" (the area responsible for lusty thoughts) is more than twice as large as a woman's,

"Men thrive on intrigue.... A little distance fuels his fantasies."

You Show Him Your Sweet Side

Going out of your way to display affection for your guy and make his life easier? Okay, we know it sounds 1950s, but it turns out, men are craving TLC these days. According to Denver relationship therapist Carolyn Bushong, author of *The Seven Dumbest Relationship Mistakes Smart People Make*, women now juggle so much—work, a social life, hobbies, a relationship—that some of the first things we end up dropping when we're relaxed in a twosome are those gestures that don't seem like a huge deal but mean a lot: downloading a song he's been humming onto his iPod, intercepting a call from his annoying landlord so he doesn't have to deal, showing up at his door after a long day with a six-pack and DVD.

Although you probably don't see yourself in the caretaker role, it's still necessary to demonstrate that you have his back—that's an important part of the bond for men, especially now, when so many guys feel vulnerable in other areas, like their careers. Another reason it resonates: "When men are in a relationship, they seek emotional support almost exclusively from their partner," Sherman explains, "whereas women have friends and family they're comfortable turning to."

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according to Louann Brizendine, MD, author of *The Male Brain*. They just can't help but see the world through sex-colored glasses.

For example, a man passing a woman on the street will pick up on *everything* physical: hair, eyes, figure, skin, smile, outfit. "Then he rapid-fire processes each of these cues to assess what they say about her sex potential," Bushong explains. "Is she attractive? Does she find him attractive? What would sex with her be like?"

What we're saying here is that guys are hardwired to analyze a woman's appearance. All. The. Time. Instinctively, they're searching for certain visual tip-offs that will bode well for his lust life. And that doesn't stop just because he's in a long-term relationship. In his mind, having a girlfriend who chooses heels instead of flats and takes 10 minutes to blow out her hair ups his chances of having steamy sex for years to come.

You Keep Him Engrossed

Picture a group of men hanging out together. When they're not riveted by the game, they're swapping stories—and trying to one-up each other with a tale that's crazier, funnier, or grosser than the last. "Storytelling is a crucial way guys bond with other guys," Dr. Brizendine says. "It lets them express that they like each other in a casual, 'manly' manner."

That's why dudes also connect more easily with women who can keep them entertained during a conversation. And let's be clear: A rundown of your girlfriends' emotional lives or even a recap of your frustrating workday is not considered engaging fodder in guy world. Yes, he cares about those things, but what will make him smitten is hearing you express a strong opinion, relate a too-freaking-weird-to-be-true tale, or bring up a fascinating blog post you read that morning.

These kinds of discussions are actually proven to increase your relationship satisfaction too: A recent University of Arizona study found that people who have many meaningful conversations about real issues are happier than those who frequently engage in a lot of small talk.

You Leave Something to the Imagination

Guys aren't dumb. They know you pee, wax, put on zit cream.... They just don't want to think about it, much less have you hand them a mental picture. "Many men are brought up to believe that disclosing intimate details in any area of life is a sign of weakness," Bushong explains. "TMI is not only a turn-off, but it also forces him to rethink his image of you as a strong, sexy woman."

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It's natural to want to get closer to your guy by being totally open with him, yet maintaining a sense of mystery is especially crucial as things become serious. The excitement of getting to know you was a big part of what drew him to you in the first place. Since that element of the unknown creates sexual tension, you need to sustain it over time. "Men thrive on intrigue.... A little distance fuels his fantasies," Bushong notes. "And those fantasies are what keep him curious and drive him to crave more intimacy with you." So let some stuff stay under wraps, like by closing the door before you pull on Spanx.

The value men place on autonomy is biological: In prehistoric times, guys who mastered the solitary act of hunting were the ones who survived to pass on their genes. And adding to that primal instinct: Guys are staying single longer. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median age for men to marry is 28, up from 23 in 1970 (it's 26 for women today). The extra solo time makes dudes more intent on remaining self-reliant even after they're involved with someone. "It's difficult for him to switch gears and settle into being part of a couple," Dobrenski points out.

The key is to show him that, although you're a team now, he still has independence. "A man wants to feel like you love and accept him for who he is and don't have some master plan to change him," Dobrenski says. Knowing you won't have a fit if he leaves the toilet seat up or occasionally stays out till 2 a.m. playing Nintendo DS with his buddies makes him fall that much harder for you. ■

Wearing clothes that match his patio furniture isn't necessary... but it's nice.



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Qualities That Surprisingly Don't Matter

After polling hundreds of men, it turns out there are a few factors you may be sweating that they couldn't care less about.

1 A really laid-back attitude. A lot of guys need a woman who can keep them motivated and in line. If she's too relaxed, then there's no one to push him forward when he needs a good shove.

2 Supermodel looks. Men know the bikini-clad chicks in most mags have been Photoshopped and the actresses on *Hornyhoties.com* contain more silicone than actual flesh. When it comes to a girlfriend, they want a woman who's sexy, yeah, but also real.

3 Being neat and not messy. It's cool if she likes to clean, but being with a girl who's ultra-anal only makes them nervous they'll constantly be ordered around to pick up after themselves.

4 Interest in his hobbies. Many guy pastimes are about escaping regular life and hanging with dudes who are into the same stuff. Your wanting to participate in everything can scare them into thinking you'll take that away from them down the road.

—MYATT MURPHY