

# MARRIED... With Friends

Staying close with your pals BY ELENA DONOVAN MAUER



LEAH MCCORMICK

**AS A BUSY BRIDE, YOU BARELY HAVE TIME FOR YOUR FIANCÉ**—let alone your friends. But before you skip yet another outing with the gals, remember: Your friendships will be an important part of your life long after the honeymoon's over, and that means you should do all you can to keep those girlfriend bonds strong. Here's how to make sure the big step forward you're making with your fiancé doesn't mean a big step backward for you and your friends.

## schedule them in

Your calendar is quickly filling with vendor appointments, dress fittings and prenuptial events. On the other hand, your friends (unless they're planning their own weddings) are probably still chatting over cocktails or dishing at book club—and missing you. They may not take your sudden unavailability lightly: If your pals feel

neglected, they might distance themselves from you or overreact to little things that normally wouldn't bother them.

The best way to avoid this sounds easy enough: Make time for your friends, even during this busy period. "Brides need to make a conscious effort to keep their relationships strong," says Kathleen Brehony, Ph.D., author of *Living a Connected Life: Creating and Maintaining Friendships That Last* (Owl Books, 2003). So pull out your planner or PDA and schedule time with your friends, just the way you would write in an appointment with your caterer.

Even if your time is incredibly tight, you can still find creative ways to hang out with pals: Just multitask. "Get your hair highlighted together, go for manicures together, meet at the gym and use the treadmills together. Or get up an hour early and meet for lattes in the morning," suggests Marla Paul, author of *The Friendship Crisis: Finding, »*

*Making and Keeping Friends When You're Not a Kid Anymore* (Rodale Books, 2004). And take advantage of wedding traditions that will involve your friends in the event. You can make your pals bridesmaids and get them to actively participate in many aspects of planning, or simply bring along a stylish girlfriend and get her feedback on china patterns if your fiancé isn't interested in the registry.

Even if you're unable to block off as much time as you once spent with one another, getting together with friends will show them that they're important to you—and that you'll make time for your pals after you're married, too.

### imagine their feelings

An important thing to remember is that your marriage feels like a big change to your friends, too. In fact, some close friends might not admit it, but they may feel left out by the fact that you're getting married—even if you and your fiancé have been a couple for years. “A wedding is a symbolic acknowledgement that the person you're marrying is the most intimate person in your life, and your friends are forced to accept that they're not always

your to-be-wed status? It may be helpful to take time to discuss the issues and feelings that crop up. “Talk about the changes so one of you doesn't feel hurt and pull away,” says Paul. “Reassure her that you might be overwhelmed with the changes in your life over the upcoming months, but you want to hang in there with her for the long haul.”

### do something new with single friends

If you and your single pals usually hit the nightclub and bar scene together, you'll likely want to change things up a bit now that you're an engaged woman.

But a good friendship can make the transition to other venues. “You may not be available to go out to bars, but you can go to lunch. Or you could take a course together on wines or mixing the drinks she likes,” says Sandy Sheehy, author of *Connecting: The Enduring Power of Female Friendship* (William Morrow). Make an effort to be the one to come up with solid suggestions for girl-time alternatives.

And you could always invite your single pal over to watch a movie or have dinner with you and your fiancé. “People need to get over the third-wheel

fiancé and your friend's mate to become friends with each other. “That creates a new unit,” says Dr. Brehony. The women can do one thing while the men do another. “And all four of you can go to the movies together,” she says. That way, you're getting your girl time, they're getting their guy time—and you and your fiancé can add one more friend to your list without having to make extra time in your busy schedules.

### don't force things

If a girlfriend doesn't like your fiancé—or vice versa—it can be really frustrating for you. But this isn't necessarily a dire situation. Often, the resentment might simply be a byproduct of jealousy. Or it might just take your friend and your husband-to-be time to realize that they're allies—two people who care about you.

Whatever the issue, all you can do is open the door for them to get to know and like each other. “Give them an opportunity to spend time together, so they can forge their own relationship,” says Dr. Brehony. You may even want to arrange a situation where your fiancé and friend work on a project together—

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going to be number one,” says Karen Eng, editor of *Secrets and Confidences: The Complicated Truth About Women's Friendships* (Seal Press, 2004).

So remember that a friend's suddenly negative behavior may simply be a way of showing that she's having a hard time dealing with the impending change in your relationship with her. “If you're aware of your friends' feelings, you can help them make the transition,” says Eng. “A lot of times we see friendship in the ‘B.F.F.’ kind of way, where you have to always be best friends and nothing will ever change, but a friend can't expect you to get married and not change. You need to be able to evolve and grow with your friends.”

How do you handle it if your friend is having a difficult time dealing with

thing,” says Dr. Brehony. “It's unfortunate for both single people and married people to automatically cut people out of their lives, especially those who are good friends.” If your friend is really uncomfortable hanging out with just the two of you, make the evening a group activity. “Have her over to dinner, along with two single male friends and another single woman,” says Sheehy. “Become a catalyst for her meeting guys. She'll be very appreciative.”

### become “couple” friends

Your friends who are also in romantic relationships present a completely different obstacle: scheduling. You've both got future in-laws, date nights and the guys' friends to work around. One way to make it work is to encourage your

perhaps your fiancé can turn to your friend for wedding gift ideas, for instance. They may find that they have something in common besides you.

But, in the end, if they still can't find common ground, don't push them together. “Just see her separately,” says Paul. Be wary of discussions about your future husband in her presence—you don't want to let her badmouth your guy to you.

And what if your fiancé still doesn't get why your girlfriends deserve extra time and consideration? “Explain to him that you'll be a happier person and a better wife with your girlfriends in your life,” says Paul. It's the truth: Countless studies suggest that the more friends you have, the more mentally and physically healthy you are (*see box, next page*)—and that's something everyone can agree on. ■

## Friends Are Good For You (and your marriage)

Why go through all the effort to maintain those friendships? Because you get just as much out of them as you put in.

- **Friends keep you healthy**—mentally and physically. A strong social network promotes healthy responses to stress and speedier recovery from illness. “Friendship even staves off depression because it keeps you in touch with your feelings,” says Sheehy.

- **Friends help you let off steam.** Whether you need to discuss an issue in your marriage or vent about your boss, your friends can be there for you. “A friend will bring up the positive aspects of the marriage rather than reinforce the problem,” says Stacey Oliner, Ph.D., a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. “The female friendships give women a [neutral] place to talk about their concerns.”

And when it comes to other issues in your life, studies show that men tend to want to “fix” problems, while women are more likely to let you “vent” and sympathize with you, which is often more comforting. “Your husband might give you advice on how to deal with your boss, whereas your female friend may just listen and continue listening to you, even if you gripe every week,” says Sheehy. “If you did that with your husband, he might say, ‘Why didn’t you try what I said you should do?’”

- **Friends cultivate other aspects of your personality.** “The people in your life nurture you in different ways. You’re more funny with certain friends and more athletic with others,” says Paul. So keeping your biweekly jogging plans with one girlfriend will keep you healthy, and gabbing over lunch with a work pal will sharpen your networking skills and help you reenergize for the rest of the day. Because spending time with your girlfriends will help you develop your personal interests, it will also help you maintain your sense of self throughout your marriage, which will keep you satisfied, confident and aware of your own values. And it will strengthen your relationship with your future husband. “You’ll keep bringing fresh things to the marriage,” says Sheehy. —*E.D.M.*