The stress of getting married

You've met someone special, spent time getting to know each other and have made the momentous decision to commit yourself to that one person: forever. You've decided to take the plunge and get married. Fortunately, you are not alone: almost all of us go through the wedding process. In fact, fewer than 10 per cent of Canadians never marry, according to The Family Dynamic, A Canadian Perspective.



Getting married is supposed to be the happiest time of life, and for many, it is. But for millions of brides and grooms-to-be, weddings are a stressful, anxiety-ridden affair. Why?

Two major sources of pre-marital stress are:

Planning the wedding. Details, details, details!
Pre-wedding jitters. Enter self-doubt and questions about whether you're making the right decision.

Planning Your Wedding: Without the Stress

Planning your wedding can be stressful. It's an important event for you, and for those closest to you—your parents, in particular. There are countless decisions to make, and your underlying desire for everything to be perfect. But, the fact is, you can avoid a lot of stressful situations by setting boundaries and planning ahead.

Trying to please everyone, professional wedding planners point out, is one of the main factors in wedding planning stress. There are too many opinions flying around and everyone seems to have their own idea of how the wedding should be. Remember—your wedding is your own and should unfold the way you want it to. To prevent others from taking over, sit down with your fiancée at the early stages and figure out exactly what you envision for your wedding day.

Bear in mind that it's a big day for your families, too and your parents in particular. You don't want to disappoint them, so, it's important to choose your battles: be willing to give in on things you don't care about and to stand firm on issues that are important to you.

Keep Things in Perspective

Help make your nitty-gritty decisions easier by following this simple exercise:

Close your eyes and imagine your life 10 years from now. Will you or other people remember any wedding "glitches" or imperfections? If the answer is no, then don't spend a lot of time deciding. Will people remember the envelope colour of your wedding invitation? Or how many gowns you changed in and out of during the banquet? What the colour of the tablecloth you used was? Chances are people won't remember and neither will you.

Pre-Wedding Jitters

As you plan for marriage, you learn that almost everyone has a definite idea of "the one thing you really need" to make a good marriage. One of your friends tells you that, "all you need is love," while another stresses, "good communication." Your parents believe that "the key is to marry someone with the same values." Everyone has advice for people considering marriage. Expect them to share it.

This barrage of information, on top of your new responsibilities can leave you feeling uneasy and worried, even jittery about your upcoming vows.

The Jitters

- You're more irritable, impatient, and annoyed than usual.

- Everything about your fiancée suddenly starts to bug you: bad habits, the messy kitchen, the cat, everything.
- You can't sleep, or eat. You sweat, or shake.
- The thought of merging your life with someone becomes terrifying.
- There is a lull in your sex life.
- All of the above are normal reactions to anxiety around the anticipating marriage. Your nerves will eventually return to normal.

Easing the Jitters

- **Communicate with your partner.** Talk about your anxious feelings, and about your love for each other.

- **Spend some time alone together.** No, not going over the seating plan for the wedding reception. Go away, alone, for a weekend, somewhere quiet and rediscover why you chose to marry this person.

Know the difference between "pre-wedding jitters" and a serious problem—should you call off the wedding?

Having the jitters, even a bad case, is normal, and not reason enough to call off the engagement. But, there are some problems in a relationship that shouldn't be dismissed:

- **Abuse.** Physical or emotional.
- **Addiction.** Drugs, alcohol, or gambling.
- **Serious family issues.** Parental disapproval or discordance.
- **Sex.** Unpleasant or hurtful.
- **Betrayal.** Cheating, stealing, or dishonesty.
- **Religion.** Conflicting beliefs that can't be resolved.
- **Children.** Different expectations for raising a family.
- **Spending money.** Opposing attitudes/philosophy.
- **Sexual orientation.** Your partner's preferences are different from what you were led to believe.

If you are facing one or more of these issues, put the wedding on hold, and get some advice, or seek professional help.

Is there a way to measure compatibility?

The Marriage Triangle

Social scientists and clinicians have found about two dozen specific factors that predict future marital satisfaction. These factors form a model known as the marriage triangle.

The three major pieces of the triangle are:

1. **Individual traits.** These include an individual's personality traits and emotional health, as well as values, attitudes, and beliefs. Examples are: flexibility and self-esteem (positive factors), depression and impulsiveness (negative factors), interpersonal skills (e.g., assertiveness), and realistic beliefs about marriage.
2. **Couple traits.** These include couple communication and conflict resolution skills, how long and how well the couple knows each other, similarity of values and goals (positive factors), and living together as a trial marriage (negative factor).
3. **Personal and relationship contexts.** Which explore family background characteristics—such as previous marriages—existing children, the quality of parents' marriage, family relationship quality, age, and parents' and friends' approval of the relationship.

Assessing Yourself and Your Relationship

Knowing and understanding the elements that make up a compatible relationship is the first step. There are many premarital assessment questionnaires that cover the important issues in the "marriage triangle." To get the full benefit of a premarital questionnaire, have it assessed by a trained marriage or family counsellor, as part of your premarital counselling.

Premarital Counselling

Most premarital counselling includes using a written questionnaire. Premarital counselling usually involves five to seven sessions that deal with:

- Interpreting test results
- Setting goals
- Improving communication skills
- Discussing other important topics related to marriage
    - Finances
    - Roles in marriage
    - Having children

Most couples find premarital counselling helpful in working out problems or issues before they get married. It also establishes a positive attitude about seeking help should marriage problems arise in the future.

Take a moment to determine whether you are feeling stressed about the wedding planning or about the marriage. If you are having trouble getting organized, it doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t marry your partner, it simply means that you need additional help. Remember, being nervous about getting married is normal but if you find yourself constantly concerned about the marriage it may be time to seek professional support.