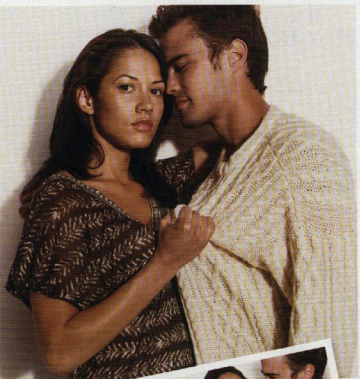
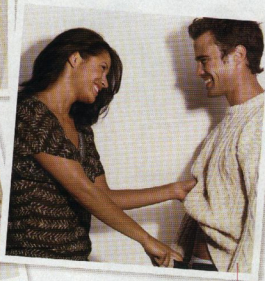




Who are you calling Sugarlips?

Is "Snugglesunny" the best you can do?



If you want me to call you Mr. Big, you're going to have to earn it.

The secret language of close couples

Why cutesy names and code words may be the key to supergluing your bond

By Leslie Goldman

Photographs by Ray Lego

Lovey-dovey language—even your own—can be so corny it makes you want to puke. But researchers have found that it might actually serve a purpose: Pet names and code phrases pave the way to a playful, resilient, and satisfying relationship. One study on couples' "insider language" published in the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* reported that the more goofy names, made-up terms, and covert requests for nooky a couple used, the higher their relationship satisfaction tended to be.

The quantity of sweet or silly nothings you utter on any given day may be even more important than the quality, says Jamie Turndorf, Ph.D., a New York City relationship therapist. Studies have found that couples who maintain a five-to-one ratio of positive to negative communications are far more likely to remain happy. "Using nicknames and made-up language

is an easy way to inject positive communication into everyday life," Turndorf says. In fact, it's probably the single easiest thing you can do to keep your relationship going strong.

Whether it's baby talk or coded conversation ("It's getting chilly." Translation: "Let's leave now."), the overall message is: The two of you are tight. "You are saying, symbolically, that

CHOOSE TO WALK

Explorer and filmmaker **Céline Cousteau** spotlights environmental and cultural issues worldwide and is a face of **Rockport's Choose To Walk** campaign. This exciting new campaign features people who choose to walk their own path. Rockport shoes let them walk it in complete comfort and style.



We asked Céline for her thoughts on choosing to walk. Here's what she had to say:

Q WHY DID YOU TEAM UP WITH ROCKPORT'S CHOOSE TO WALK CAMPAIGN?

A It's genuine and realistic, supporting those already in the field.

Q WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO CHOOSE YOUR OWN PATH?

A Once you find your passion and listen to it, you open up your own paths in life. The important factor is to at least do something—be proactive.

Q ANY ADVICE ON GETTING STARTED?

A When you're real with yourself, you give more and do better.

Q WHERE ARE YOU WALKING NOW?

A I'm in the Amazon a lot working on *Into the World with Céline Cousteau*, streaming web videos promoting meaningful connections between people and the environment, and providing actionable solutions to issues.

ROCKPORT
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SEX & RELATIONSHIPS

you care enough about the other person and the relationship to develop your own way of speaking," says Carol Bruess, Ph.D., the director of family studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, and a co-author of *Belly Button Fuzz* and *Bare-Chested Hugs: What Happy Couples Do*. "You've got your own private world, your own mini culture."

THE MEANING BEHIND A MONIKER

Pet names also create a boundary, says Pat Love, co-author of *How to Improve Your Marriage Without Talking About It*. "It's a way to identify the relationship as exclusive," she says. "It's like an auditory marker." When people around you overhear your cutesy conversation, they know you're committed to each other.

The inside banter can also serve as a fast-forward button, says Lillian Glass, Ph.D., a communication and body-language expert based in Los Angeles. Sometimes, after a rough day at work, you just want to come home, flop onto the couch, and pop open a bottle of something smooth and red. How great is it when your partner knows that "the usual" is code for "My imbecile boss just wasted six hours of my life with mindless busy work and I'm really in a mood right now"? Statement, sentiment, and your current mental state all rolled into two words—no need to relive the whole disastrous day blow by blow.

Personalized lingo not only can bond a relationship—it can bail it out, too. University of Western Ontario psychology professor Lorne Campbell, Ph.D., has researched the use of humor during conflicts. In a study published in the journal *Personal Relationships*, Campbell found that when goofing around is used to help resolve disputes, it ultimately strengthens the relationship. Tossing in an inside joke during a would-be brawl not only relieves the tension, he says, but brings you back to the present.

CEMENTING MEMORIES

It's no coincidence that new couples give each other nicknames that are sugary and food-related. Cupcake. Honeybun. Peaches. "Sweet is an unequivocally positive descriptor," Glass says. "You're comparing the other person with a treat—something special that you look forward to every time." As a relationship matures and trust builds, you may develop pet names that refer to a feature or

PET NAME HALL OF SHAME

WH readers and staffers confess to cringe-worthy couple talk. Identities have been withheld to protect the guilty!

"I started calling my husband Pooh, as in Pooh Bear. But somehow it quickly morphed into Poop, and it stuck in my head. I mean it in the most loving, sweet way."

"I use Dude on everyone. For my boyfriend, that gets lengthened to Dudely, and, often, Doodles."

"My husband calls me the Funky Cold Medina Goose. The 'goose' part is because he thinks I'm silly. Plus he likes to say I eat like a bird."

"My guy started calling me Pumpkin, and that evolved into Pumpkins, then Punky, and eventually Punky Pants."

"I once called my wife Snuggle Muffin. She responded by calling me Cuddle Biscuit, which unfortunately she's been calling me ever since."

"One time I texted my BF jokingly: 'Love you lots, tater tots!' He sarcastically replied, 'Hug & kisses, Princess Fish Sticks!' And that nickname stuck—Fish Sticks. Can't get more romantic than that!"

"I used to call my boyfriend Cuddlefish, a name invented during a date at an aquarium. Cuttlefish, cuddle, barf!"

"I tried to come up with the most nauseating thing I could think of. I landed on Bunny and, sadly enough, it stuck."

Myth vs. Fact



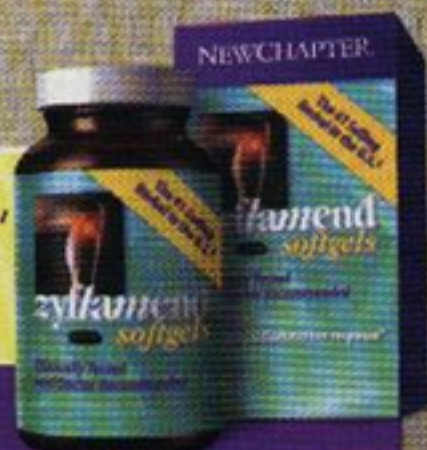
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Fact: The body's natural inflammatory response affects everyone and every major organ system.

Myth: There is no natural way to respond to inflammation.

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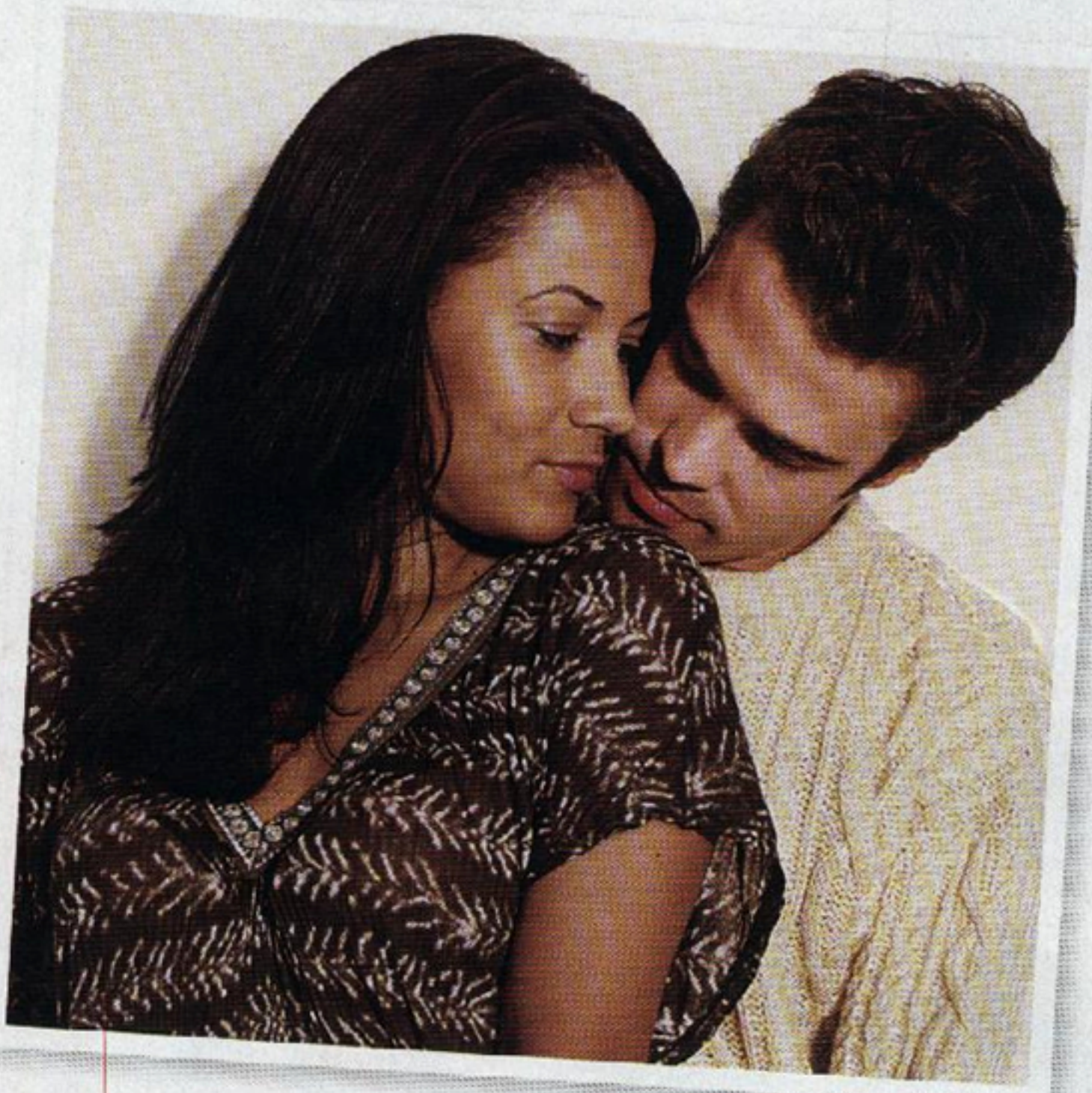
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SEX & RELATIONSHIPS



Don't save all the pillow talk for bed.

personality trait of your partner (like calling your boyfriend Leo when his beard grows shaggy and out of control). That kind of "just between us" language drives home how well you know each other.

Every shared experience, Glass says, opens doors for more nicknames and inside jokes, which become earmarks for your most meaningful memories. Whether he calls you Rodeo, after the horseback-riding trip you took on your first anniversary, or you call him Speed Racer, for the time he drove 90 mph to get you to the airport on time, the names are a way of tracking your romantic history. "You have a word that signifies a time, a date, and a place, and it takes you back to that moment," Glass says.

Of course, for a nickname to work, both parties have to be happy with it. If it annoys you when your man calls you Stinky in memory of your bad bout with Indian food last fall, that's definitely not going to bring you any closer. "You're putting your trust in the other person to treat you in a safe and intimate way," Glass says. "Tread carefully."

THE ONE MUST-SAY PHRASE

What if you and your man would rather cut your tongues out than utter a ridiculous nickname? Don't worry; you're not doomed. Worse, Turndorf says, is a

It's a huge red flag when your partner stops calling you by your pet name. It sends the signal "I'm not being intimate with you anymore."

relationship in which "I love you" is hardly ever said. Still, she encourages couples to come up with as many catchphrases as they can stand. They don't have to be gooey and sweet—funny is fine. But one big red flag to watch for is if your partner stops calling you by your pet name, Love says. "It's like calling a naughty kid by his full name. It sends the signal 'I'm not being intimate with you anymore.'" When that happens, it's time to figure out what in your relationship needs fixing.

Bottom line: Having a shared language can only help strengthen the connection you feel with your partner. So swallow your pride and bring on the shmoozy. ■

SOUND OFF

WOMENSHEALTHMAG.COM/SOUNDOFF
TELL US THE PET NAMES YOU LOVE—OR HATE—AND WHAT THEY MEAN!