

## Avoid becoming a Bridezilla by remaining stress-free



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I can't believe it's my turn.

For years, I've watched friends drop like flies off the face of the earth after they got married, and I finally get to join them. I cannot wait.

Don't get me wrong. I wasn't a woman who was dying to take the plunge ASAP -- you know, the moment a brave, willing chap came along. Marriage wasn't even on my radar screen until early last year, when I realized I was sitting on the couch next to the most perfect man in the world for me.

From that moment on, I couldn't wait to join the leagues of married folk over the edge of the earth and become his wife.

Say what you want about the challenges of marriage, but this is one love-struck chickie who is willing to work hard to hang onto this man. I'll sacrifice, compromise, hold my tongue, even admit that I'm wrong every once in a while. The great thing is, I know he'll do the same.

Which brings us to the topic of this column and -- as it was for many, many couples before -- the first big challenge for my fiancé, Ryan, and me.

Planning a wedding.

Three little words that strike fear into the heart.

A common groom's solution: elope. A common bride's: try to plan something that pleases everyone on the planet, especially her groom and parents, but not excluding family members on both sides, her friends, coworkers, acquaintances, people she's talked to at parties and that woman who sold her nail polish once who knew more than J. Lo about how a wedding operates.

### Take care of yourself

There are many types of stress associated with a wedding, said Cindy Heroux of Oviedo, Fla., a wellness consultant and author of "The Manual that Should have Come with Your Body."

There's "the physical stress of getting everything done, the mental stress of time and financial

expectations from family and friends, as well as the anxiousness associated with going from single to married," she said. "But there are lots of things the bride can do to keep the stress from taking over her life and reducing her joy."

Here are some tips:

- Take care of yourself. You are more important than your wedding.

"Eating right, getting enough exercise and sleep are key to keeping stress under control as well as looking great for your big day," she said. Getting a massage and taking warm baths are a couple ways to relax and rejuvenate as well.

- Focus on what's really important. The wedding is about marrying the one you love, not the color of the napkins.

- Get organized. Create a master plan of what needs to be done when, and keep all of your wedding-related information in one place. Searching for things, forgetting important information and getting behind can create lots of unnecessary stress.

- Manage your time effectively. Prioritize what needs to be done and delegate anything you can't handle without making yourself crazy.

- Breathe. Take breathing breaks throughout the day. It will help keep stress from building up.

- Don't compare your wedding with others. This day belongs to you and your fiancé and no one else.

- Be flexible. Stuff happens, but

As someone who's participated in my share of weddings, I know all too well that by the time the event takes place, the groom has often slumped into a state of resignation and the bride has become the Furor in white, often referred to as Bridezilla. This can happen even to nice brides. I've seen it.

But I so don't want to be Bridezilla. I'm laid-back, easy going -- someone who goes with the flow and would rather not bark orders at my closest loved ones.

I wanted some advice on how to keep stress to a minimum while planning a wedding, so I sent a query over the Internet, and some good advice flooded my e-mail inbox.

Most helpful was Rosanna McCollough, editor in chief of WeddingChannel.com. I gave her a phone call and typed like crazy as she spewed her genius.

Bridal stress is caused by many things, she said. Just the overwhelming idea of throwing their biggest party to date is scary for many couples, she said. Then there's the No. 1, ever nagging detail of keeping to a budget.

First, she said, decide what's important to you and your groom. A lot of people have advice on what you should do, but don't think for a second you have to take it.

"Don't let people boss you around," she said. "Do what you think you should do. The bride and groom should have their own priorities and sense of style and organize wedding plans around those factors."

Then determine exactly how much money you have to work with.

"You have to have that talk as soon as possible so you don't have that pickle of having unmet expectations later on," she said.

Wrangling over the guest list comes next because the number of guests determines how much you can spend on food and everything else.

From there, McCollough said, plan in this order: "Get ideas, get advice and finally, get it done."

And take advantage of all the planning resources out there. Web sites abound for assisting brides. Along with WeddingChannel.com, there's theknot.com, the topweddingsites.com and so many more -- even more specific sites, like gettingremarried.com.

"When I was getting married, you just had to get 100 pounds of bridal magazines," McCollough said. Now, she said, you can go to Web sites like hers and see thousands of photos of dresses, cakes and even napkins, showing how to fold them or decorate them with fresh flowers or ribbons.

You can find what you're looking for -- when you're looking for it. Then when you show up at the caterer's or bridal shop, you're armed with photos of what you're

the more flexible you are the less stress the unexpected will cause.

- Keep things in perspective. Your wedding is a big event, but there will be many important events in your life. If something goes wrong, it's not the end of the world.

looking for, which makes the process much smoother, she said.

The Web can make it much easier to communicate with your guests, too. Instead of launching into a phone-call frenzy to inform people about developments, many couples are setting up a Web site with dates, times, hotels, maps and registry information.

"You're able to put a lot of information in one location and direct everyone to the Web site," McCollough said, and you can set it up for free through the WeddingChannel.com site.

It's always a good idea to include all the necessary information and RSVP cards in the mail as well, but a Web site can disperse and gather information more quickly from the guests with access.

I also asked her how long it takes to plan a wedding, and she said you can plan it as quickly as you want. It can be planned in one day, if you're that flexible, she said.

When I asked her how to keep the love alive while you're in the middle of this whirlwind, she said make sure the wedding is not the only thing you talk about. It can cause a serious strain on your relationship.

"A wedding is one aspect of their life," she said. "You don't have to dwell on every little thing so that it's taking over. Put it in its place.

"The actual wedding planning process is about how you work together to achieve your common goals -- not so different from how you will work through things for the rest of your marriage."

Finally, she advised brides not to expect perfection on the big day. You're setting yourself up for a big letdown.

"Smart brides know something is likely to go wrong, and the point is not to let it upset you," she said. "Be ready for those things, and just let it go. No one is likely to know that it happened but you.

"The day is going to be over so quickly. You're getting married to the person you love, and you're surrounded by your friends and loved ones. It's about enjoying yourselves and having a wonderful day that is the first day of the rest of your lives together."

Sounds good to me.

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