

# Icks

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An 'ick' is a behaviour in a partner we find unpleasant or disturbing, and it can move us from a feeling of desire to a feeling of disgust. There are several levels of icks:

**Firstly, there are those areas that are common to most of us.**

These are behaviours which are considered almost universally impolite or annoying. For instance, it is never likely to inspire confidence or love if I continually check my phone when you're talking to me.

Often these *widely-felt* icks are about physical things: in fact, the very term ick suggest a wince or turning away from a body issue. Obvious examples include picking your nose, belching or farting; but even apparently innocuous behaviours like drumming with your fingers or tapping with your foot can irritate a partner to the point of desperation. *Stop!* Another might be the - apparently affectionate - hand on my knee when you sit on the sofa, doing annoying spider movements - *if you're going to touch me, just stop being so tentative!*

Does *anyone* like these things?

**But some icks may be more individual or personal.** *I can't bear it when I can hear you eating!* (This condition is called **misophonia**, or a sensitivity and repugnance to certain sounds and their possible associations). *That little snort sound you make after you swallow drives me nuts!*

These icks won't annoy everyone, but can be even more upsetting than the general kind. This all strays into the area of phobias and mental health conditions, but of course - subjectively - they are all just icks.

**Some icks are associated with particular areas of life.** Technology such as phones give us a whole new world of ways to be upset with each other, and not just when we use a phone to distance ourselves (phones are regularly used in relationships to regulate intimacy).

*It's totally stupid the way you look at cat videos all day!* This becomes an ick, not because there is anything intrinsically objectionable about a cat video,

but because it can seem to go to the character of the person watching: shallow, unmotivated, over-sentimental!

Similar phone-based icks are the Instagram pout, or the posting of details of your breakfast. We either take part in this, or decry it (there's apparently no neutral middle ground!) - and if we are in the latter camp, it's an ick.

Dating apps are another rich source of icks. The profile picture with sunglasses (*really?*). Or the guy (and yes, it's usually a guy) leaning on his car (*are you serious??*).

It's the icky text too - *please* don't say, 'I really don't know what to write here...' (*so don't put up a profile at all!*). Or 'satisfaction guaranteed' (*hey, go satisfy yourself, why don't you*).

**Icks are an inevitable part of all couple relationships.** To avoid them becoming destructive, you have to address them with your partner so they can change their behaviour, or else you learn to ignore them. If there are very personal issues like misophonia, you may benefit from some individual therapy.

Equally, if the ick is just a symptom of deeper-level malaise in the relationship (which is often the case), couple counselling can really help.

In my experience, being open about an ick is probably the best way to deal with it.

Don't forget that getting creeped out by stuff is *your* feeling, and the other person is not responsible for your icky response! Good luck.

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***James Earl is a relationship and psychosexual therapist with a thriving private practice in South West London.***

***He specialises in improving communication, restoring desire and intimacy, and helping with sexual problems.***

***In his individual work, he is pioneering inspirational new approaches to anxiety, depression, OCD, addiction, anger and trauma, outlined in several award-winning animations produced in conjunction with a ShootYou, an Anglo-American film company.***

***Recent media appearances include articles for Newsweek, and an interview by Mariela Frostrup for Times Radio. He is also the relationship columnist for the Liz Earle Wellbeing magazine.***

***James taught philosophy for many years at Richmond American University, and has also been a successful jazz musician. He was the resident jazz pianist at The Ivy Restaurant in London, and headlined the famous Jazz Café with his trio.***