

Having Friends Could Save Your Life

"Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review."

Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, J. Bradley Layton.

[PLoS Medicine](#), 7(7): e1000316; July 2010. DOI:10.1371/journal.pmed.1000316

A lack of social interaction might be just as bad for you as smoking or drinking. Get out there and be friendly.

Here's a new health risk to worry about as you get older: A lack of human contact. According to researchers from Brigham Young University, low social interaction has the equivalent lifespan impact as smoking 15 cigarettes daily, or being a raging alcoholic. Cutting yourself off from others is worse, even, than inactivity. And twice as bad as obesity. So, you better start making friends.

The [research](#) is based on a meta-analysis of 148 previously published studies measuring how often people interacted and their health outcomes.

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The results, which appear in [PLoS Medicine](#), are worrying because people are becoming more and more atomized. "The modern way of life in industrialized countries is greatly reducing the quantity and quality of social relationships," say the editors. "Many people in these countries no longer live in extended families or even near each other. Instead, they often live on the other side of the country or even across the world from their relatives."

And yet, "the idea that a lack of social relationships is a risk factor for death is still not widely recognized by health organizations and the public," the paper notes. It's an afterthought compared to smoking and drinking, despite evidence that the medical community could improve health by encouraging socialization. "People with stronger social relationships had a 50% increased likelihood of survival than those with weaker social relationships," the paper says.

The researchers speculate that stronger relationships with family and friends have a sort of positive feedback effect. Older people are better looked after, but they also take better care of [themselves](#).

"Physicians, health professionals, educators, and the media should now acknowledge that social relationships influence the health outcomes of adults and should take social relationships as seriously as other risk factors that affect mortality," the editors say.

Comments

Visitor Opinions (latest shown first)

Evolution of social animals

posted by **Ron Horgan** on 31 Jul 2010 at 1:54 am

This very important article provides evidence of how social harmony and inclusion helped group survival.

The powerful mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion acting on the health of individuals is still part of our makeup.

While good social contact is obviously the first approach, perhaps learning to control our feeling of wellbeing independent of social pressures is also a valid idea.

After all if the group messages are being transmitted to the individual, "he" still has to respond. If it is an evolutionary process it will be very ancient and probably predate language. Even so, wellbeing as the sum of these influences might be under individual control.

Debate anyone?

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Worth the time to read!

posted by **b** on 28 Jul 2010 at 2:17 pm

This is absolutely true. I have personally witnessed family members and friends left as widows begin to suffer from dementia very soon after being left alone. The sad thing is they possible could have lived long productive lives had they seen the damage loneliness can do to the mind and body. Even we as a family should have gone to great lengths to help them socialize with neighbors and church members. It is very sad.

Thank you for the information.

b

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I agree with ^

posted by **anna** on 28 Jul 2010 at 6:54 am

I think the amount of social interaction people need varies greatly among individuals. I know some people who are very needy and can't seem to stand to be alone, while others (like myself) crave alone time when I've been around other people too long. I do think its important for

everyone to have some kind of support system, i.e., I need to know there is a sympathetic ear when I've had an awful day.

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Smoking

*posted by **rakesh waghmare** on 28 Jul 2010 at 6:50 am*

Hi, I am already addicted to cigarette smoking. Pls help for the symptoms on this disease. And I will controll our smoking habits but, I am sure cough is there any where. Pls reply your information on cigarette smoking.

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Interesting

*posted by **Anon** on 28 Jul 2010 at 5:28 am*

I wonder why some people who are "loners" thrive then. The problem I have with these assessments is that each person has individual needs. I remember a friend who is very social and loved meeting new people but he often told me he felt depressed anyways. Also what about the people who get sick from stress dealing with people in customer service jobs?

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Great Article

*posted by **terry** on 28 Jul 2010 at 2:51 am*

Great article ...social isolation is one of those "hidden" social problems, especially effecting the elderly. I have lived in a big city, and there was much more opportunity for social interaction for elder singles than in the much smaller community I live in now.

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