

Connectedness has Acquired a New Meaning for Health

For today's health researchers, a person's connectedness with family, friends, and community has a new significance. It means fewer illnesses and medical complications, and faster recovery and rehabilitation. Connectedness may be the single most important factor for survival.

Just ten or fifteen years ago, had anyone blamed loneliness for physical illness, he or she would've been laughed at. A doctor making such a claim would've been thrown out of the medical society. Nobody thinks such a claim to be fantastic or "soft science" anymore. Isolation has emerged as a significant health risk in numerous studies across the world.

In one such study, researchers followed 4700 residents of Alameda county, California, from 1965 to 1974. In ten-year period, the people who reported the least social contact, died at a rate nearly three times higher than those reporting the most. The nature of companionship didn't matter—it could be anyone, a partner, relative or a friend. What mattered was the degree of connectedness with others—the amount of time one spent in the company of others.

As a result of this awareness, "enlightened" researchers are not merely asking people about their cholesterol, diet, or exercise, but they want to know about the quality of their relationships. Today's researchers ask fairly specific questions, such as the following:

"Do you feel isolated?"

"Does your wife show you her love?"

"Are you close to your parents?"

"Do you feel loved?"

"Do you have a confidant?"

"Do you live alone?"

Imagine being asked questions of this nature! If you're like me, perhaps, you want to shout back at the interrogator, "It's none of your business, doc!" However, all of the above questions have proven to be highly relevant to health. How you answer them can tell professionals something about the status of your health in years to come.

For instance, women who say they feel isolated are three-and-a half times as likely to die of breast, ovarian, or uterine cancer over a 17-year period. In another study, the single most important factor in a cancer patient's history was not exposure to a chemical, pollutant, or carcinogen, but the loss of a loved one within five years of the onset of cancer. Seventy-three percent of cancer patients in that survey had lost a loved one in the five years prior to the onset of cancer.

Men who say that their wives don't show them love suffer 50% more angina over a five year period than those who say their wives do.

Male medical students who felt close to their parents were less likely to develop cancer or mental illness in later years than those who didn't feel so.

Among heart patients, those who felt the least loved had fifty percent more arterial damage than those who felt the most loved. That is as close a connection between love and heart as one can get, medically speaking. Here is another evidence for more of the same. Among unmarried heart

patients, those who said that they had a confidant were three times less likely to die within five years than the ones who said they didn't.

People who volunteer their time in helping others and/or participate in religious and community groups remain more healthy. Participation in a support group consisting of people who have a similar problem is highly beneficial for rehabilitation after a medical illness.

What you do today has effect on your health, four or five years from now. Therefore, to be happier and healthier tomorrow, stay connected today.

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