The Power of Love

Satisfaction in romantic relationships can boost our physical and mental well-being.

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Perhaps the best confirmation we have that love bestows benefits on our health is seeing what can happen to an individual when a cherished mate dies. Indeed, findings show that the loss of a spouse or significant other can lead to a decrease in life expectancy, a suppressed immune system, heart disease and mental health issues, such as depression.

In a study that tracked 225 people who underwent coronary bypass surgery, researchers asked those who were married to rate how satisfied they were with their relationship one year after undergoing the operation. Scientists adjusted for age, sex, education, depressed mood, use of tobacco and other factors known to affect survival rates for cardiovascular disease.

Findings showed that 15 years after their surgery, 83 percent of the wives who were happily wedded had survived compared with 28 percent of the women who were in unhappy marriages and 27 percent of the women who were unmarried.

In addition, researchers found that the survival rate for happy husbands matched the survival rate for contented wives. Interestingly, men in dissatisfying marital unions enjoyed a 60 percent survival rate, but that figure dropped to 36 percent for unmarried men.

The findings build on previous research showing that couples with harmonious marriages suffer from less of the kind of inflammation linked with heart disease.

This is why many experts believe doctors should pay attention to certain lifestyle factors, including relationships, that allow some individuals to beat the medical odds.

What’s more, the benefits of a satisfying romantic partnership extend to mental health. According to a Department of Health and Human Services report, getting married and staying married reduces depression in both men and women.

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