



# e-quilibrium

- *"electronic briefs on behavior and health"*

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## Capitalization

Suppose that something good has just happened to you. Which of the following behaviors is best for your health?

- a. silently celebrating
- b. finding or calling a good friend or loved one and sharing the good news
- c. taking the positive event in stride without any celebration

One of these choices is an example of what UCLA psychologist Shelly Gable calls "capitalization." You are likely familiar with the term "capitalization" used in grammar (upper case letters), in economics (conversion into accumulated goods/possessions), or with respect to taking advantage of opportunities. Gable's use of the term refers to sharing good news and thereby deriving additional benefits from the positive experience. So the correct answer to the question is "b."

Psychologists have long been interested in understanding how people cope when something bad happens. Gable studies how people respond when something good happens. She has found that telling others about a good event amplifies the positive emotion associated with the occurrence. Retelling creates the opportunity to re-experience the event, and the related good emotions. Furthermore, the retelling helps solidify the event in memory.

But there's more to the story. Sharing good experiences can foster positive social interactions and potentially strengthen

relationships, depending upon the response of the person with whom you share your good news. The type of response that is associated with better relationship quality is an “active and constructive” response. That is, the recipient who hears your good news responds in an enthusiastic manner, as if she/he is happier for you than you already are. The recipient wants to hear more, giving you even more opportunity to talk about the positive experience. Gable has obtained evidence that “active and constructive responding” in relationships is a better predictor of relationship health than is conflict.

How is this relevant to health? Research is continuing to illuminate the connection between positive emotion and health, and it is well established that having good relationships in one’s life is health-enhancing. The process of communicating positive experiences with others (capitalization) augments positive emotion, and relationships are strengthened when the response is enthusiastic (active and constructive).

This is not to suggest that we ought to run around bragging when something good happens to us. Rather, it does suggest that telling important persons in our lives about our good experiences, in an honest and genuine fashion, is a healthy thing to do.

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