



e-quilibrium

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Others

We know a great deal about factors that increase the likelihood of living longer and healthier:

- avoiding smoking
- minimizing alcohol consumption
- getting regular physical activity
- maintaining a lean body weight
- taking medication to control high blood pressure

Obviously there are additional factors that could be mentioned, but if there were one factor that had an even greater impact on longevity than any of those mentioned above, it would certainly be noteworthy.

Such a factor exists and was examined in a large meta-analysis of 148 studies (representing over 300,000 participants) by investigators from Brigham Young University and the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill. The factor is having good social relationships. Other people matter to us, and to our health.

Social relationships were measured in a variety of ways in the studies that were included in this meta-analysis. These included getting support from others, perception of the availability of social support, loneliness, marital status, number of social contacts, breadth of social relationships, living alone, and social isolation. It is interesting to note that the better quality studies (i.e., those that used more than one method to measure the presence of relationships) found the strongest association between social relationships and longevity.

Furthermore, it is likely that this review underestimates the effect of relationships on mortality because the quality of relationships wasn't considered. It is well established that negative social relationships increase mortality risk, but in this analysis, most of the studies assumed relationships to be positive (something that is clearly not the case).

Certainly having good relationships in our lives is something most of us want, and some of us nurture. Research in positive psychology suggests that having good relationships is the most important ingredient in happiness and life satisfaction.

Unfortunately, there is much evidence that the quantity and quality of social relationships is eroding in developed nations. More people report having no confidant, there is greater social mobility (vs. stability), there are more single-resident households, and more social isolation is reported in spite of greater opportunity for social connections. Good relationships don't necessarily just happen. They typically are the result of effort.

Certainly the investment one makes in nurturing good relationships in one's life enhances the quality of life. It appears that so doing also increases the likelihood of living a longer life.

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