



Forgiveness: Your Health Depends on It

Whether it's a simple spat with your spouse or long-held resentment toward a family member or friend, unresolved conflict can go deeper than you may realize—it may be affecting your physical health. The good news: Studies have found that the act of forgiveness can reap huge rewards for your health, lowering the risk of heart attack; improving cholesterol levels and sleep; and reducing pain, blood pressure, and levels of anxiety, depression and stress. And research points to an increase in the forgiveness-health connection as you age.

“There is an enormous physical burden to being hurt and disappointed,” says [Karen Swartz, M.D.](#), director of the Mood Disorders Adult Consultation Clinic at The Johns Hopkins Hospital. Chronic anger puts you into a fight-or-flight mode, which results in numerous changes in heart rate, blood pressure and immune response. Those changes, then, increase the risk of depression, heart disease and diabetes, among other conditions. Forgiveness, however, calms stress levels, leading to improved health.

Can You Learn to Be More Forgiving?

Forgiveness is not just about saying the words. “It is an active process in which you make a conscious decision to let go of negative feelings whether the person deserves it or not,” Swartz says. As you release the anger, resentment and hostility, you begin to feel empathy, compassion and sometimes even affection for the person who wronged you.

Studies have found that some people are just naturally more forgiving. Consequently, they tend to be more satisfied with their lives and to have less depression, anxiety, stress, anger and hostility. People who hang on to grudges, however, are more likely to experience severe depression and post-traumatic stress disorder, as well as other health conditions. But that doesn't mean that they can't train themselves to act in healthier ways. In fact, 62 percent of American adults say they need more forgiveness in their personal lives, according to a survey by the non-profit Fetzer Institute.

Making Forgiveness Part of Your Life

Forgiveness is a choice, Swartz says. “You are choosing to offer compassion and empathy to the person who wronged you.” The following steps can help you develop a more forgiving attitude—and benefit from better emotional and physical health.

Reflect and remember

That includes the events themselves, and also how you reacted, how you felt, and how the anger and hurt have affected you since.

Inward Bound Network

Free Guided Meditations Anytime Anywhere

InwardBoundNetwork.com



Empathize with the other person

For instance, if your spouse grew up in an alcoholic family, then anger when you have too many glasses of wine might be more understandable, says Swartz.

Forgive deeply

Simply forgiving someone because you think you have no other alternative or because you think your religion requires it may be enough to bring some healing. But one study found that people whose forgiveness came in part from understanding that no one is perfect were able to resume a normal relationship with the other person, even if that person never apologized. Those who only forgave in an effort to salvage the relationship wound up with a worse relationship.

Let go of expectations

An apology may not change your relationship with the other person or elicit an apology from them. If you don't expect either, you won't be disappointed.

Decide to forgive

Once you make that choice, seal it with an action. If you don't feel you can talk to the person who wronged you, write about your forgiveness in a journal or even talk about it to someone else in your life whom you trust.

Forgive yourself

The act of forgiving includes forgiving yourself. For instance, if your spouse had an affair, recognize that the affair is not a reflection of your worth, says Swartz.

Article from John Hopkins Medicine

<https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/wellness-and-prevention/forgiveness-your-health-depends-on-it>