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How Your Relationship Status Affects Your Health

By Rosemary Black

[Single? Married? Divorced? Your answer may have a direct impact on your health.](#)

Want to live a long, healthy life? You may stand the best chance if you're happily married. Married folks are less likely to get heart disease, cancer, and even dementia, according to research reported in *The New York Times*. But don't think you'll stay healthy if you're in a toxic relationship. If you and your spouse are miserable together, the health benefits disappear.

"If you're in a marriage where there is a high degree of conflict and where the fighting is negative and nasty, this negates the health benefit," says Marsha Lucas, Ph.D., licensed psychologist and neuropsychologist and author of *Rewire Your Brain for Love*.

While being divorced may not confer major health benefits, it's certainly better from a wellness standpoint than being in a miserable marriage, says April Masini, relationship advice expert. "Lots of times there is a relief at being divorced and out of the daily stress of a failing marriage," she says.

Also, the health benefits tend to stop when the marriage ends. When married people become single again through divorce or the death of a spouse, they suffer more chronic health issues, according to a study published in *The Journal of Health and Social Behavior* and reported in *The New York Times*. The study, which focused on 9,000 individuals in their 50s and 60s, found they experienced 20 percent more chronic illnesses than people still married to their first spouse by middle age.

It once was believed that singles who had never been married were in poorer health than married people. But, research shows, individuals who are either divorced or widowed actually suffer more health issues than people who've always been single.

Why does a happy marriage make you healthier? Stress—whether from being in a bad marriage, or a divorce—is linked to inflammation, Lucas explains. "And inflammation is one of the markers for all kinds of diseases, from dementia to heart disease," she says.

Being single can be stressful as well. Human beings are wired for connections, Lucas explains. "Your health is better when you are in a relationship simply because we survive better when we have those connections," she says. "Adult humans in a healthy relationship tend to thrive. There's a decrease in the level of stress and the sense that there is increased safety in our world."

Singles generally fare more poorly in terms of both health and longevity than do married people, according to research. One study, published in *The American Journal of Epidemiology*, found that the risk of death was 32 percent higher for single men as compared to married men, and 23 percent higher for single women than for married woman, across a lifetime. Among the reasons why this could be are lower income, insufficient health benefit, and simply the fact that singles may not enjoy as much social support as married couples.

"If you're a couple, a spouse may be after you to eat better and go to the doctor," David Roelfs, lead author of the study and a University of Louisville, Kentucky professor, told *Msnbc.com*. "Sometimes it's just easier to be healthier and less of a risk taker when you're married."

Is Your Relationship Healthy?

Relationships are complex. Figuring out if you're in a healthy one isn't. You're in an unhealth relationship if:

- » You and your spouse fight nastily, rather than mindfully, your relationship may be in trouble, Lucas says.
- » You have no empathy for your partner, your relationship is not a healthy one.
- » Your style of conflict is stressful, it's worth examining the relationship. "Couples that have greater emotional resilience tend to bounce back from a fight more quickly, and they don't have the same fight over and over," Lucas says.

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