

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Dr. Joseph Baker

Relationships and Health

Valentine's Day fanfare — from the cards to the flowers and candy — all say "I care about you" to anyone close to our hearts. It's obvious that supportive relationships — that last long after the Valentine's chocolates have been consumed, cards recycled and flowers wilted — tremendously affect psychological well-being.



Dr. Baker stresses the connection between body and mind, which is a cornerstone of the chiropractic lifestyle and preventative health care. The chiropractic lifestyle involves a balanced life, allowing time for close friendships, relaxation, exercise, healthy eating, adequate sleep and chiropractic care.

Lack of quality relationships is an emotional instigator of stress. And stress leads to a spinal condition called **vertebral subluxation**, which is associated with a vast array of ailments. Chiropractors correct vertebral subluxations with chiropractic adjustments. However, chiropractic is unique because it also teaches patients to prevent this health-robbing condition.

Jam-packed schedules that limit time to build loving relationships eventually take a toll, especially as the body ages. This Valentine's Day, Dr. Baker encourages you to nurture your close relationships and look for ways to create new ones. Why? Research

shows a powerful association between health and kind relationships.

Results from two recent surveys, each including over 1,500 participants, showed that empathetic relationships are tied strongly to wellness. "Social networks, integration and support demonstrated unique positive associations with health," conclude the authors (*Soc Sci Med* 2004;58:2069-81).

Create Connections

You don't have to have a Valentine's Day sweetheart to reap the benefits of caring relationships. The wellness-boosting advantages of relationships stem from anyone who's close to our hearts — from a friend or family member to a coworker.

If you're searching for meaningful relationships, try participating in local community events that you enjoy. Finding friends with similar interests can jumpstart companionship. For example, local clubs, college extension classes, specialty instruction like gardening or cooking classes, community exhibits, the gym, etc. can be great places to connect with people around you. Volunteering is another winning way to foster close relationships.

Prioritize Your Pets

Research shows that the health benefits of loving relationships aren't limited to people, but also include pets. The special relationship that you have



with Frisky or Fluffy has proven to boost psychological and physical wellness in both pet and owner, such as reducing incidences of heart disease, hypertension, stress, anxiety and depression. Hours spent playing, petting, brushing, holding and talking to your pet are by no means a waste of time.

Head off Heart Disease

Letting your heart fall in love may be the best thing for it. Research shows that loving relationships lower an individual's chances of the No. 1 killer — heart disease.

A three-year study in Toronto, Canada focused on 103 married individuals with mild hypertension. After three years, subjects who reported "marital satisfaction and cohesion" had a lower risk of heart disease than they did at the study's onset (*J Psychosom Res* 2003;55:229-33).



**Dr. Joseph Baker, Limerick Chiropractic Center (610) 489-1000
332 West Ridge Pike, Limerick, PA 19468**

Studies also demonstrate that simple physical contact, such as a hug or holding hands, reduces cardiovascular risks.

In one experiment, researchers divided approximately 100 couples into two groups. One group held hands with their partner for 10 minutes while viewing a romantic video, followed by a 20-second hug. The second group of couples rested quietly for the 10-minute and 20-second time periods without any physical contact.

Both groups then participated in a stressful public speaking test. Individuals in the contact group experienced lower blood pressure and heart rate elevations compared with the no-contact group. The researchers determined “that affectionate relationships with a supportive partner may contribute to lower reactivity to stressful life events and may partially mediate the benefit of marital support on better cardiovascular health.” (*Behav Med* 2003;29:123-30.)

Metabolic Syndrome’s Met Its Match

Metabolic syndrome is a cluster of conditions — including high cholesterol, high blood pressure, elevated insulin levels and excess body fat around the waist — that occur together. Metabolic syndrome is associated with a bolstered risk of diseases like diabetes, cancer, stroke and heart disease.

Not all experts agree that metabolic syndrome is a distinct medical condition, but the consensus is that the percentage of people with this cluster of disorders is on the rise. The good news is that quality relationships slash the likelihood of developing metabolic syndrome, according to recent research.

At an initial visit and three years later, 413 middle-aged women assessed the quality of their relationships. Researchers also evaluated them for metabolic syndrome during the two visits and at a follow-up exam an average of 11.5 years later.

Single women with supportive relationships and women in “moderately satisfied” and “satisfied” relationships were least likely to develop metabolic syndrome. Divorced, widowed or unhappily married women who reported lacking supportive relationships were significantly more likely to develop metabolic symptoms (*Arch Intern Med* 2005;165:1022-7).

Kick Cancer

Research indicates that compassionate relationships increase an individual’s ability to fight cancer and cope with the disease.

In a study performed in Japan, researchers interviewed 272 men and 252 women with cancer and then asked them to complete questionnaires measuring mood and how they were coping with the disease.

Those with caring relationships showed the highest level of fighting spirit (*Support Care Cancer* 2003;11:604-10).

Stay Sharp

The key to maintaining a sharp mind may lie in daily social interaction and encouraging relationships. Hours alone without support have a profound negative effect on cognition, especially among seniors.

A study at the University of Montreal, Quebec, Canada tracked a cohort of people over the age of 65. Researchers assessed cognitive function over four years.

The results were clear: Strong social engagement with anyone close — including spouses, friends, children or relatives — enhanced cognitive function and decreased deterioration.

Lack of social connections and infrequent participation in social activities sped cognitive decline. “This longitudinal study indicates that few social ties, poor integration, and social disengagement are risk factors for cognitive decline among community-dwelling elderly persons.” (*J Gerontol B Psychol Sci Soc Sci* 2003;58:S93-S100.)

Drive Away Disability

For seniors, enjoyable relationships also protect against physical disability.

In Adelaide, Australia, researchers investigated the influence of relationships on disability. Data came from 1,477 participants aged 70 years or older. Supportive social networks, especially those involving family members, cut the chances of developing disabilities. The scientists concluded that “the effects of social relationships extend beyond disability in activities of daily living to disability in mobility.” (*J Aging Health* 2004;16:517-38.)



Our Unique Approach to Wellness

This chiropractic office teaches patients that physical health is inseparable from happiness and a balanced, joyful life. Our preventative approach to wellness centers on the mind and body connection. This Valentine’s Day, schedule time to relish close friendships. Your relationships — and health — will reap tremendous benefits.

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