

The Importance of Friendship

It is widely held that friendship and people's health do not have any direct causal relation. Nevertheless, this common belief is totally amiss due to the fact that friendships actually have an enormous impact upon one's health. This impact is so big that it also affects moral development. Therefore, let us consider what aspects of friendship do indeed influence health. Are there only positive influences? What about negative ones? Allow me to try and find a balance

- *'Friendship is unnecessary, like philosophy, like art... It has no survival value; rather it is one of those things that give value to survival.'* - C.S.Lewis.

Most research in this area has been focused on families with variables according to social class and age differences. Evidently, one can be more influenced by family or by friends according to one's age. For instance, in childhood you are more directly influenced by your family, particularly by your parents. Later in adolescence friends tend to take the upper hand, whilst in adulthood a rebound occurs and we again are more influenced by our familial circle.

To start with, the less fruitful your social relationships are the worse your health can become and conversely the more positive social relations you experience the better overall health you will have. According to scientific research, having no friends increases the risk of early mortality. However, having a rich social circle can help increase the chances of a longer life. Naturally one would presume that having

a rich social life would lead to a more positive outlook and better mental health.

However, here we see a direct influence on physical wellbeing.

Have you ever asked yourself if my friends contribute something to my overall health? If you have answered affirmatively maybe you are a genius, as this is exactly what it does. However, it must be said that there is also data that shows that the relationship between health and friendship is bidirectional. In fact, the influence that friendships have have both positive or negative effects.

As we see health impacts on friendship in positive and negative ways. Children and adolescents with chronic diseases such as cancer, asthma or diabetes normally do not have any problems related to their disease at the moment of making new friends. However, those with stigmatizing conditions, such as mental health difficulties (YP-MHD), are more likely to encounter negative socializing conditions.

In both the young and adults friendships have an important role in the development of habits. Constructive friends help each other by encouraging beneficial habits, for instance, physical activity, dietary concerns, adequate sleep patterns and so forth. Furthermore, adult women encourage each other to participate in sport. This has a highly strong correlation. Another recent study has shown that women prefer to consult their families when they need to determine personal decisions such as health choices.

It is clear that friendship acts as a 'buffer'. Overall, it acts as a 'stress-buffer', by

sharing positive experiences and it is also clear that it can help with personal and social wellbeing and happiness. After some research, scientists have discovered how to predict if a friendship is going to last, and their effects, based on a 10-minutes discussion.

A study among the Scottish cohort found that the number of friends you have in childhood determine your self-rated future health as adults. There are gender differences between these associations such as for men there is a threshold effect, the ones without friends have poorer health, and for women it is a gradient effect, fewer the number of friends the poorer their health. As it was said previously friendship influences health. It has such a big impact that it can also reduce the number of days to recover from an important injury, or put simply, it accelerates recovery.

Four years ago, in 2018, researchers arranged a project where they studied a type of prairie dog, whose genome shares 90% with humans. Results showed that friendship modified their genome, specifically one of their genes related with vasopressin, which function is to regulate the tonicity of body fluids. When you are getting to know someone new you normally don't trust him. Although, when time passes, you start getting more confidence. For that confidence to last, your genome needs to reorganize, so V1aR (vasopressin) starts moving through the genome until it reaches its new site. This is how confidence is established.

From what has been presented one might conclude that friendship is essential for a long, healthy and happy life. I can prove it because I have friends that make me happy whenever I talk with them. From hating sports I started playing volleyball, tennis and ping pong just because my friends encouraged me to do so. Now I love sports and I do not know how my life would be without them. To sum up if you need a rock to lean on, lean on your friends.

Bibliography

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