Marriage is often advocated by many for religious reasons. Others believe marriage is good for both family and community stability. Most experts also agree that the majority of children benefit when reared in a two-parent family. But, recent research suggests that there is an additional reason to promote stable, supportive marital relationships. It is becoming increasingly evident that a good marriage is good for your health.

In his popular book “RealAge” Michael F. Roizen, M.D. studied more than one hundred health behaviors that impact not only on how long we live but also on how well we live. He reports that marriage is a critical relationship: “Happily married couples live longer. Indeed, people who indicate that they are happily married show a RealAge difference of as much as 6.5 years younger than their unmarried counterparts… If you are happily married or involved in a stable long-term relationship, know that it is making you younger.”

Roizen also claims, however, that a stressful or abusive marital relationship can actually have a detrimental impact of health and longevity and urges such couples to work to improve their relationship. He further notes that in these cases “a divorce may be the only solution, and one that will do the most to prevent you from unnecessary aging.”

Another major document noting the importance of marriage on personal health was published in 1996. It was titled “The Costly Consequences of Divorce: Assessing the Clinical, Economic, and Public Health Impact of Marital Disruption in the United States.” This highly scholarly report contained a summary of more than four hundred studies that have been made about divorce and its consequences.

In the introduction to their report, the authors ask: “What would you say if someone told you that a particular social bond could add years to your life and ensure your children a better education and economic livelihood? Furthermore, what would you say if you also found out that breaking this social bond was only slightly less harmful to your health than smoking a pack or more of cigarettes per day and could significantly increase your risk of depression, alcohol abuse, and committing suicide?”

The report continued: “And what would you say if you found out that this social bond that was potentially so beneficial to you and your children’s health and personal well-being was marriage? Truly, the research is striking. For decades, studies have shown that the married live longer and have lower risk of a variety of physical and psychological illness than the unmarried.”
In addition, this report also found that people in stable marriage have greater economic security, have less acute or chronic sickness or disease, have lower rates of suicide, have fewer fatal accidents, are less prone to alcohol abuse and have fewer psychiatric problems such as depression and schizophrenia.

Another researcher, Robert H. Coombs, professor at the UCLA School of Medicine, also reviewed the literature and found a link between marital status and personal well-being. He stated, “The media glamorize the single status implying that the unmarried are unencumbered with the problems that beset their married counterparts.”

But, based on his research findings, Coombs rather sadly observed that the “therapeutic benefits of marriage remain relatively unrecognized by most youth, the media and some helping professionals who, preoccupied with accelerating divorce rates and variant family forms, question the value of marriage in contemporary society.”

Professor Coombs concluded we need to be teaching “that it is in each person’s own best interest to establish and maintain a durable relationship with an emotionally supportive spouse. The lack of this resource is a mental health deficit.”

Is marriage good for your health? Bottom line: it depends on the nature and quality of the relationship. Numerous studies have indicated that a stable, loving marriage can add a significant number of years to life. But recent research also notes that difficult and/or abusive marriage can actually shorten life by a number of years.

Along with Dr. Roizen, all researchers note that marriage is just one factor contributing to health and longevity. Almost all agree, however, that marriage is an important area. Entering a stable, enduring marital relationship and then treating each other with civility and love may be one of the best health resources available today. But as Robert H. Coombs observed, this resource is largely going unnoticed. Perhaps contemporary Health Maintenance Providers should seriously consider his observation.

To increase the status of your health and increased longevity continue jogging or exercising, take your daily vitamins and watch what you eat. And, if you are married treat your spouse with a little more kindness and consideration? As some experts now claim, such acts could help both of you be “healthier, wealthier, and sexier.”

For a variety of reasons it is now becoming increasingly evident that a good marriage is truly something worth pursuing.

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