

Social interaction it is vital to human health, both mentally and physically.

Dr. Thomas Glass, a Harvard professor wanted to know what the key was to living a long life, besides just "good health".

"So, in a study of 2,761 people 65 and older who were followed for a period of 13 years, the researchers tracked participation in 14 activities, which included everything from swimming and brisk walking to shopping, doing volunteer work, and playing cards with pals.. They found that people who spent time in social activities -- volunteering, running errands, or getting together with friends -- fared just as well as those who spent the time exercising" *
(*web MD resource)

"One way is by boosting the immune system, which wards off disease. "We've seen again and again that people who are lonely or socially isolated show signs of suppressed immunity," says Ohio State University immunologist Ronald Glaser, who along with his wife Janice Kiecolt-Glaser pioneered the study of how mental states affect the immune system. " *

Social interaction where people can talk out their problems and feel accepted and understood is very beneficial to mental health.

Doctor McClintock, Director of the Institute for Mind and Biology, found that rats living in groups lived 40% longer than those housed by themselves and also recovered more quickly from illness. This experiment has been extended to comparing lonely and social humans and although the trial is still running, early indications show the lonely people don't recover as quickly from illness, don't sleep as well and have higher systolic blood pressure. The early trial conclusions state that social interaction helps people be healthier and live longer.

This has also been found in other studies including Cacioppo, who found lonely people show a number of adverse cardiovascular changes compared to people with friends. They have faster heartbeats, higher blood pressure and poorer sleep. So this closely mirrors McClintock's findings

There is also good evidence that social support has a favorable influence on a wide range of illnesses including heart disease, cancer, hypertension and respiratory disorders.

Good support can help protect against the harmful effects of stress by helping people cope better. Social interaction and support has been found to help cope with major life changes such as emigration, moving house, redundancy and bereavement. The complex nature of social situations makes it difficult to isolate social interaction as the only cause of improvements or protection of health. However, so many studies have found that social interaction has a major role in improving health and the fact that all folk cultures value this interaction is strong evidence of the power of social interaction.
