



The Mind-Body Connection . . . Between Stress and Disease

There was an email circulating on-line that caught our eyes.

"In an evening class at Stanford University the last lecture was on **the mind-body connection . . . between stress and disease**. The speaker (head of psychiatry at Stanford) said, among other things, that (while) one of the best things that a man could do for his health is to be married to a woman; for a woman, one of the best things she could do for her health is to nurture her relationships with her girlfriends. At first everyone laughed, but he was serious"



[1]Since there's always a chance of misinterpretation and confusion, and because we found all of this so interesting, we did some sleuthing and found and talked to the person who gave the lecture - [Dr. David Spiegel](#) [2], Director of the Center on Stress and Health, Professor in the School of Medicine, Associate Chair, Stanford University School of Medicine - Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences. ~~The Center on Stress and Health~~ researches interrelationships among the social environment, mind, brain and body to understand how stress and support can influence health - a field known as ~~integrative medicine~~. The emailer went on to state a number of "claims" the presenter was said to have made, including: 1) Quality "girlfriend time" helps women create more serotonin - which helps combat depression and can create a general feeling of well-being; 2) Women share feelings whereas men often form relationships around activities; 3) Spending time with a friend is just as important to our general health as jogging or working out at a gym; 4) Failure to create and maintain quality personal relationships with other humans is as dangerous to our physical health as smoking!

Dr. Spiegel was happy to tell us he did give the lecture (you can see it [here](#)), and, in fact, did make the statements included in the opening paragraph, including "one of the best things she (a woman) could do for her health is to nurture her relationships with her girlfriends."

Dr. Spiegel also told us research has proven that creating and maintaining quality personal relationships with other humans is good for our physical health - although at this point there is no research comparing its benefits to curtailing smoking!

Dr. Spiegel also said such other claims as - quality "girlfriend time" creating more serotonin; women sharing feelings whereas men forming relationships around activities; spending time with a friend is as beneficial as jogging - were not made by him, nor has he (or we) found any research that says any of these ideas are true.

Dr. Spiegel has conducted some ground-breaking research, though. "Healing And Feeling: Stress, Support, and Breast Cancer" (recently discussed on *Good Morning America*) provided positive research that mind-body interventions can improve mood, quality of life and coping skills, as well as alleviate symptoms.

Spiegel found that stress can elevate the chance of developing breast cancer, and that the stress of dealing with cancer can both wear down the endocrine, nervous and immune systems, affecting the body's ability to fight disease.



[3]"These studies underscore the importance of treating people's psychosocial needs, not just their biological ones," Spiegel said. "Integrative medicine needs to be an integral part of cancer care." The landmark study also found that women with advanced metastatic breast cancer involved in a support group, along with traditional medical care, not only experienced reduced anxiety, depression and pain, but survived an average of 18 months longer than women who did not take part in a support group. **If we can modulate emotional and psychological responses, we can have a direct effect on physical health.**

And this is where Personal Safety Nets come in to play. Paying attention to the whole of our lives, to the wellness parts, if you will, pays huge dividends. When we're well supported by people, plans, and both inner & outer resources we have many more options for addressing any challenge. We have a stronger sense of security and connection. We know who to count on for what, and how to ask for and graciously accept help, paying kindness forward. Those support groups that Spiegel found so important, are easily called into action.

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Links

[1] <https://personalsafetynets.net/file/55>

[2] <http://stressandhealth.stanford.edu>

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