



LOVE notes

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A Happy Marriage Helps Women with Work Stress

Have you ever had one of those work days when it feels like one more thing is going to push you over the edge? Deadlines, increased responsibility, unhappy customers, a demanding boss can all contribute to something most of us have felt at one time or another in our working lives—stress.

Rena Repetti, Ph.D., Adrienne Nishina, Ph.D., and graduate student Darby Saxby, at the University of California, Los Angeles suggest what they describe as an unusual way for women to unwind after a stressful day at work. The answer? A happy marriage.

Cortisol is the Guilty Party

When we're under stress, our bodies release a hormone called cortisol. The website scientificblogging.com cited that "long-term raised levels of cortisol have been linked to depression, burnout, chronic fatigue syndrome, relationship problems, poor social adjustment and possibly even cancer."

They also supported the idea that for the majority of people, our levels of cortisol actually start out high in the morning, but will fall throughout the day barring any stressful events. Stress signals the adrenal gland to release cortisol. How quickly your body is able to reduce the cortisol that has been released is one way to measure your overall health and well-being.

Men Benefit From Marriage

Past research has shown that men appear to get a health and long life boost from simply being married, while for women, being married is only helpful when the marriage is good. This

finding held true in the UCLA study. At the end of the day, men, no matter the quality of their marriage, showed a large cortisol decline.

Women Benefit From Happy Marriages

The UCLA team of researchers found that overall, "women in happy marriages enjoyed stronger cortisol declines than their counterparts in less blissful unions." The study showed that less happily married women had a slower pattern of cortisol decline, which may suggest that they don't recover from daily stressors as well as happily married women.

What's the Connection?

The researchers suggest that possibly a woman in a happy marriage may have more support from her spouse, so that at the end of the work day, no matter how stressful, she comes home to a place where she is able to share the parenting and household work load. She may even have time to unwind a bit, relax and know that her partner is picking up the slack. This allows her cortisol levels to drop.

The Roller Coaster of Constant Stress

On the other hand, if a woman goes from a stressful work environment to a stressful home environment with no break in the demands on her, cortisol levels are likely to remain high. Dr. Repetti says, "It may be that a chronically unhappy marriage creates multiple occasions everyday when the wife needs to mount a stress response, putting her cortisol levels on a kind of roller coaster ride. The system is under more wear and tear. It's like driving a car in traffic conditions that are constantly stop and go. You step on the gas and apply the brakes, step on the gas, apply the brakes. Over time

you create a less reliable system. You don't stop and re-accelerate as quickly. You don't recover as quickly."

If You're on that Roller Coaster

Try these suggestions if you find yourself on the roller coaster of reacting to stress in your life.

try this...

1. Talk to your husband about how stressed you feel and ask for more help with parenting and/or household tasks. Talk about what both of you need to increase your level of happiness in the marriage.
2. Know yourself and how you react to stress. Choose to think about life events in ways that create less stress. We may not be able to choose what happens, but we can choose how we think about what has happened.
3. Get creative about finding even a little down time between work and home.
4. Stress management experts offer these suggestions for reducing stress. See what works for you. Taking a few good, deep breaths to get more oxygen into your body; going for a walk or doing other exercise; listening to music that you like; practicing yoga or other stretching, and mutually satisfying sexual activity.

Sources:

Staff Editors. (January 2, 2008). [ScientificBlogging. Cortisol Study Shows A Happy Marriage Reduces Stress In Women - But Not Men. http://www.scientificblogging.com/news_releases/stress_hormone_linked_to_satisfaction_in_married_women_but_not_men](http://www.scientificblogging.com/news_releases/stress_hormone_linked_to_satisfaction_in_married_women_but_not_men)

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