

# Wedding belles



## Marriage is good for your health

A HAPPY marriage is something that many of us strive for. It is not only seen as the key to contentment, but also the key to better health and longevity, according to those in the know.

Women who are in satisfying marriages have a health advantage over unmarried women or those in unsatisfying marriages, concluded a study published in the American journal, Health Psychology.

The study, involving middle-aged women over a 13-year period, found that women in good marriages were less likely

to develop risk factors that lead to cardiovascular diseases compared with other middle-aged women who were in bad marriages or single.

The results showed that happily married women tended to exercise more, smoke less and felt less frazzled. As a result, their cholesterol, blood pressure, blood sugar and body weight - the big heart attack risk factors - were lower. They also felt less depressed, anxious and stressed.

The authors of the study believe that marriage itself may offer a health advantage by providing social support and protecting against the risks associated with social isolation. Also, marital influence and involvement may encourage health-promoting behaviours and deter unhealthy behaviours.

However, the research shows that poor marital quality may erase these health advantages. Marital stress is associated with lifestyle risk factors, such as excessive drinking. Bad marriages are also linked with more depression, hostility and anger: all contributing factors to coronary heart disease.

Other studies seem to agree with these findings.

On average, men and women who are in their first marriage have been shown to enjoy significantly higher levels of physical and mental health than those who are either single, divorced or living together.

Dr Robert Coombs, of UCLA in the US, found that 70 per cent of chronic alcoholics were either divorced or separated, and only 15 per cent were

married. He found that single men are more than three times as likely to die of cirrhosis of the liver. Unmarried people were also shown to spend twice as much time as patients in hospitals as their married peers and have lower activity levels.

From a healthy body to a healthy mind, happy marriages can lead to an increased state of mental wellness, according to Yale University and UCLA. Researchers have consistently found the highest rates of mental disorder among the divorced and separated, intermediate rates among the single and widowed, and the lowest rates among the married.

They also found that a cohabiting partner could not replicate these benefits of marriage.

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