

Learning to Forgive May Improve Well-Being

Science Daily

(Jan. 4, 2008) — Forgiveness may be good for your health, according to the Mayo Clinic.

Holding a grudge appears to affect the cardiovascular and nervous systems. In one study, people who focused on a personal grudge had elevated blood pressure and heart rates, as well as increased muscle tension and feelings of being less in control. When asked to imagine forgiving the person who had hurt them, the participants said they felt more positive and relaxed and thus, the changes dissipated. Other studies have shown that forgiveness has positive effects on psychological health, too. Forgiveness doesn't mean forgetting, condoning or excusing whatever happened. It's acknowledging hurt and then letting it go, along with the burden of anger and resentment. There's no single approach to learning how to forgive. Talking with a friend, therapist or adviser (spiritual or otherwise) may be helpful during the process, to sort through feelings and stay on track. The January issue of Mayo Clinic Women's Health Source covers four steps that are included in most approaches to learning forgiveness.

- Acknowledge the pain and anger felt as a result of someone else's actions. For forgiveness to occur, the situation needs to be looked at honestly.
- Recognize that healing requires change.
- Find a new way to think about the person who caused the pain. What was happening in that person's life when the hurt occurred? Sometimes, the motivation or causes for the incident have little to do with those most affected. For some people, this step includes saying, "I forgive you."
- Begin to experience the emotional relief that comes with forgiveness. It may include increased compassion for others who have experienced similar hurt.

Adapted from materials provided by Mayo Clinic.

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