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**Marital Clashes Can Slow Body's Healing Process**

**By Rita Jenkins**

Marital Clashes Can Slow Body's Healing Process

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Marital arguments can leave a husband and wife feeling emotionally wounded, but that's not all. Scientists have discovered that the stress of a typical 30-minute tiff can prevent physical wounds from healing by at least one day.

Moreover, couples whose relationships are generally hostile may suffer longer delays in the healing process -- even twice as long. This finding, published in the Archives of General Psychiatry, could have major financial implications for medical centers and healthcare insurers.

The latest research is part of a thirty-year series of experiments underway at the Ohio State University's Institute for Behavioral Medicine Research. The work is aimed at identifying and then explaining the ways psychological stress can affect human immunity.

**Psychological Preparation**

Jan Kiecolt-Glaser, a professor of psychiatry and psychology, and partner Ronald Glaser, a professor of molecular virology, immunology and medical genetics, both at Ohio State, say the findings provide important recommendations for patients facing surgery.

"This shows specifically why it is so important that people be psychologically prepared for their surgeries," Kiecolt-Glaser explains.

"We have enough data now from all of our past studies," adds Glaser, "to basically suggest that hospitals need to modify existing practices in ways that will reduce stress prior to surgery."

Such stress reduction could lead to shorter hospital stays -- with corresponding lower medical bills -- and a reduced risk of infections among patients, the researchers agree.

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### Blistering Trial

A group of 42 married couples who had been together an average of 12 years or more participated in the study. Each couple was admitted into the university's General Clinical Research Center for two 24-hour-long visits. The visits were separated by a two-month interval.

During each visit, both the husband and wife were fitted with a small suction device which created eight tiny uniform blisters on their arms. The skin was removed from each blister and another device placed directly over each small wound, forming a protective bubble, from which researchers could extract fluids that normally fill such blisters.

The husbands and wives also completed questionnaires intended to gauge their level of stress at the beginning of the experiment. Lastly, each person was fitted with a catheter through which blood could

be drawn for later analysis.

### High Levels of Hostility

During the first visit, each spouse was asked to talk for several minutes about some characteristic or behavior that he or she would like to change. This was a supportive, positive discussion, Kiecolt-Glaser notes.

"But during the second visit, we asked them to talk about an area of disagreement," she says, "something that inherently had an emotional element."

Both discussions were videotaped, and those tapes were used to gauge the level of hostility present between the couples. Fluid accumulating at the individual wound sites and peripheral blood samples were also taken from each participant.

The researchers then analyzed the data, making the following observations:

- Wounds took a day longer to heal after the arguments than they did after the initial supportive discussion;
- Couples who showed high levels of hostility needed two days longer for wound-healing, compared to couples whose hostility appeared low.

"Wounds on the hostile couples healed at only 60 percent of the rate of couples considered to have low levels of hostility," Kiecolt-Glaser points out.

### Delicate Balance

Blood samples from those highly hostile couples showed differences as well. The levels of one cytokine -- interleukin-6 (IL-6) -- increased one-and-a-half times over those in couples considered less hostile.

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Cytokines are key elements in the human immune system. They hold a delicate balance in maintaining the right immune response. Increased levels of IL-6 at the site of a wound stimulate the healing process, but those same levels circulating throughout the bloodstream is a problem.

Sustained higher-than-normal levels of IL-6 have been linked to long-term inflammation, which is implicated in a host of age-related illnesses: cardiovascular disease, osteoporosis, arthritis, type-2 diabetes, certain lymphoproliferative diseases and cancers, Alzheimers disease and periodontal disease.

"In our past wound-healing experiments, we looked at more severe stressful events," says Kiecolt-Glaser. "This was just a marital discussion that lasted only a half-hour. The fact that even this can bump the healing back an entire day for minor wounds says that wound-healing is a really sensitive process," she observes.

"This supports our long-held contention that even small changes in cytokine levels will have a marked effect on health," adds Glaser.

Rita Jenkins is a health journalist for Daily News Central, an online publication that delivers breaking news and reliable health information to consumers, healthcare providers and industry professionals:

<http://www.dailynewscentral.com>

### **Your Body Works To Keep You Well!**

**By Lawrence Stepanowicz, ND**

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You are a remarkable organism!

Your body will work to repair itself and stay well.

Drugs can alleviate symptoms. They can even kill invading organisms. But if you're going to get better, your body will have to do the work.

Take colds and fevers.

A fever is just a way your body destroys germs. It does this by bringing them to a temperature at which they can't survive. Medicine may see a fever as a symptom and high fevers can be dangerous, but a fever is part of your body's healing process.

A cold is basically a nasal infection. It can lead to sore throats and other things, but a cold lives and dies in your nose. The rhinovirus, strains of which account for most colds, gets its name from that fact. Rhino means nose.

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Cold viruses thrive at temperatures slightly cooler than the 98.6 degrees considered normal. So when faced with this invader, your body's first defense is stuffiness.

Why?

Because breathing through your nose keeps your nasal passages cooler and the virus alive.

But when you get stuffy and are forced to breathe through your mouth, your nose, no longer air cooled, reaches a higher temperature and becomes less friendly an environment for the virus. The virus dies, and after your body does some necessary cleanup and repair work, you're good as new.

That's why almost anything you do to relieve a cold's symptoms will only prolong it. It tends to interfere with your body's healing process.

Of course, some diseases are easier for your body to handle than others. That's why your best defense is a good offense and you need to take an active part in your health rather than expect your doctor to fix things after they go wrong. In most cases, he really can't fix much and anything he does will depend on your body's cooperation, anyway.

Lawrence Stepanowicz, ND is a naturopath and publisher of Practical Health. For a free subscription and a free copy of Jon Barron's "Lessons From The Miracle Doctors" visit <http://practicalhealth.net>



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