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Toxic Emotions Can Kill You

Studies Find Hostility is a Huge Influence on Premature Death and Disease

In a 20-year study of more than 200 women suffering from breast cancer, those who scored in the top 20% of the group in hostility had a 42% increased risk of premature death from all diseases (including heart disease and cancer) compared to those scoring in the bottom 20%. This disparity between the hostile group and the opposite group held up after researchers adjusted for factors such as age, blood pressure, serum cholesterol, cigarette smoking and alcohol consumption.

Pioneer Researcher Explains Mind-Body Link with Emotions and Disease

Candace Pert, PH.D, a research professor at Georgetown University Medical Center (and the discoverer of the opiate receptor), explains how mind and body communicate through *informational substances* (mostly short strings of amino acids called peptides) that function like receptors on cells all over the body. Her theory is that negative emotions have toxic effects because they are not natural, normal states. Throughout the evolution, people were very close, dependent and bonded to each other. Nowadays, we are in an era where people fly and travel to relocate to distant places -- feeling alone and isolated, and that is not natural. Our bodies are programmed to have strong relationships and we are endowed with positive bio-chemicals to help us at a cellular level. When people are full of negative emotions, generating harmful stress symptoms, those foreign peptides create abnormal, toxic effects.

Anger, Weight Gain and Heart Attacks

Redford Williams M.D. is Professor and Director of Behavioral Medicine Research at Duke University Medical Center and the author of *Anger Kills*. Dr. Williams' study has found that cellular and stress hormones like catecholamines and cortisol and stress-induced stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system negatively affect molecular processes. He comments. "People don't just drop dead without something going on at the cellular-molecular levels. You don't need a fight-or-flight response in traffic or in a supermarket line, or when you're trying to get your teenage son to clean up his room. So these reactions become maladaptive."

Dr. Williams' research has also found that hostile people consume 600 more calories per day than those with lower hostility stress levels because eating boosts low serotonin levels (a feel-good neurotransmitter), making the over-eating a way of self-medicating yourself with serotonin.

Toxic Emotions and Accelerated Death Rates

Medical studies at St. Luke's Medical Center in Chicago, and published in the American Journal of Epidemiology, found elderly patients with high degrees of negative stress anxiety emotions were nearly twice as likely to die sooner. Negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, sadness and depression were all associated with increased risk of death.

In another study that tracked 2,300 survivors of heart attacks, those who were socially isolated with high degrees of stress, had more than four times the risk of death. Dr. Dean Ornish -- cardiologist, best-selling author, and expert on diet, exercise and stress management for heart problems -- warns us: how you deal with negative emotions, is as big a factor as diet and exercise for protecting yourself from fatal heart attacks.

Stress-Related Back Pain

As early as the 1820s, Dr. Edward Shorter's writings on psychosomatic illnesses described "spinal irritation," which today is termed stress-related back pain. Moreover, what's different now is that today's diagnosis carries the meaning that the stress of the pain symptom comes from psychological and emotional factors, which are the *primary* influence. John Sarno, M.D. (the

renowned physician and professor of physical medicine and rehabilitation at New York University), terms this back pain as “Tension Myositis Syndrome,” with the causative factor coming from emotional stress anxiety.

Depression Weakens Bones

A new study shows that depression from ongoing stress may weaken bones, making osteoporosis more likely. Although the new study is based on mice, it points to a mind-bone link. The research team studied male mice living in stressed conditions (dirty cages, loud noises and bright lights). Other mice in the control group lived in clean cages without stressful conditions.

Compared to the non-depressed mice, the stressed mice behavior were clearly depressed – they drank less sugary water offered to them and responded very little when a young mouse was put into their cage. The depressed mice, after four weeks, had a loss in bone density due to a decrease in osteoblasts (bone-building cells), while the control mice did not have the same results. The loss of density in the stressed mice created a porous condition where serious breaks can result. The findings "point for the first time to depression as an important element in causing bone mass loss and osteoporosis," says Raz Yirmiya, PhD, MSc, of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

After this stage, the medical researchers added imipramine, an antidepressant, to one group of mice’s drinking water. After drinking the antidepressant, their depression lessened and their bone loss stopped. While in the group without the antidepressant, the scientists found high bone levels of the stress hormone norepinephrine. When the researchers chemically blocked the norepinephrine in those mice, their bone loss stopped. Depression has been linked to low bone mass and osteoporosis in past studies. The new findings appear in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Depression and Premature Death

Heart disease is one of many illnesses that worsen with depression. People with cancer, diabetes, epilepsy, osteoporosis, Parkinson's disease, epilepsy, stroke and Alzheimer's all appear to run a higher risk of disability or premature death when they are clinically depressed.

Anger and Hostility Affect the Immune System and Lungs

At the Harvard School of Public Health, researchers enlisted 670 men aged 45-86 in a study that showed anger and hostility can affect hormones that disrupt the immune system and cause chronic lung inflammation. The doctors assessed stress related hostility through the Cook-Medley Scale (a standard psychological test) and measured lung capacity by the volume of air expelled in one second. All the volunteers, over the next 8 years, were tested 3 times.

After filtering out factors like smoking and education, the doctors found the men’s hostility rating closely correlated to their lung capacity. The most hostile subjects suffered a more severe decline in lung function than their counterparts. Each point increase in stress related hostility was linked with a 9-millilitre loss in air expulsion. Previous research has found a link between hostility and anger with heart disease, asthma, hypertension and irritable bowel syndrome. Dr. Peter Leher, of the University of Medicine of New Jersey, theorized that anger and hostility affect hormone processes, which disrupt the immune system, leading to chronic inflammation that damages tissue.

Hostility More of a Predictor of Heart Disease Than Cholesterol and Smoking

A study reported in *Health Psychology* involving 774 men over three years, which screened hostility levels, blood lipids, fasting insulin, blood pressure, body mass index (BMI), weight-hip ratio, diet alcohol intake and smoking has found that occurrences of coronary heart disease (CHD) were more prevalent in those subjects with high levels of hostility than other risk factors such as high cholesterol, alcohol intake or smoking tobacco. The authors of the study found that

stress related hostility predicts CHD beyond risk factors of blood lipid levels, BMI, triglycerides levels, alcohol consumption and smoking.

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Sources: Triggering of Acute Myocardial Infarction Onset by Episodes of Anger *Circulation* 1995 Oct 1;92(7):1720-5 **Negative Emotion and Coronary Heart Disease** *Behavior Modification* Vol. 27, No. 1, 83-102 (2003) **Anger and Acute Coronary Events** *By Laurie G. Futterman, ARNP, MSN, CCRN and Louis Lemberg, MD. From the Division of Cardiology, Department of Medicine, University of Miami School of Medicine, Miami, Fla.*