

On Random Acts of Sweetening



The possibilities of how to share and sweeten the world are endless ... and it seems that it's also good for your health! Two interesting articles came past my desk related to this idea. They are related to the 'energy stress management' material in chapters (on stress) and the attitudinal material in chapter 12 of The Essential Guide for Energy Healing.

The first has to do with the effect of positive events on you. "Sweetening" your own life with pleasant social activities or favorite leisure activities has a powerful impact on your health. In the New York Times, it was reported that a psychologist at the State University of New York at Stony Brook conducted a study showing that "positive events of the day seem to have a stronger helpful impact on immune function than upsetting events do a negative one." In a study of 100 men over a 3-month period, it seemed that the effects of negative stressors had a negative effect on the immune system for just that day but positive events enhanced the immune system for the next two days.

How was this conclusion reached? "Whenever the men reported cold symptoms, we found an increase in undesirable events from 3-5 days before the cold becomes noticeable, and a dip in desirable events for those days." That covers the 24-72 hour incubation period for a cold.

Apparently, the surprise in the study was that the "drop in the usual number of pleasant events more strongly predicted susceptibility to a cold than did a jump in stressful events." Dr. Sheldon Cohen, a psychologist at Carnegie-Mellon University said, "Stress levels on the two or three days leading up to exposure to the cold virus, and especially on the day you are exposed, may be the key to whether you become ill... and the kinds of stress with the most impact are interpersonal, whether marital discord, problems in the family, or conflicts at work."

What I find particularly interesting about this study is that it points to the idea that there is a value system to the stress-response mechanism that differentiates between positive and negative events (both of which are traditionally included under the title 'stressor'. Our personalized, subjective world-view, once again, shows itself to be a primary causative factor in the equation for wellness.

A second report in Mental Medicine Update points to our share-sweeten idea not as we do it for ourselves but as we do it for others. Dr. David Sobel, M.D., reported that "more and more studies are showing that one specific ingredient of social contact -- choosing to help -- appears to have health benefits all its own." In a study of 2700 residents in Tecumseh, MI, for example, men who volunteer for community organizations were two and a half times less likely to die from all causes of disease than their non-involved peers.

In addition, a national survey of volunteers revealed that 95% reported that helping (sharing, sweetening) on a regular basis gave these volunteers a 'helper's high' which consists of "physical and emotional sensations including a sudden warmth, a surge of energy and a feeling of euphoria immediately after helping."

They also reported feelings of increased self-worth, calmness, relaxation and better perceived health. Helping can lessen disease symptoms, block pain, improve mood. They go so far as to say: " One of the best ways to promote your own health or to cope with a health problem is to forget yourself, forget your health, and concentrate on caring for someone else ... A regular regimen of helping may be as important to our health as regular exercise and proper nutrition."

Need ideas? Read Random Acts of Kindness by the editors of Conari Press, '93 (it makes a wonderful gift). Also, Ram Dass and Gorman Paul's How can I Help? Stories and Reflections on Service (Knopf, '91). Also, (I love the title!) Guerrilla Kindness: A Manual of Good Works, Kind Acts and Thoughtful Deeds, Impact Publishers, '93.

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