

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Steven L. Smith, DC

Health and Spirituality

Dr. Smith, a provider of holistic health care, does not view the body as a collection of isolated parts. Rather, this chiropractic office acknowledges the connection between mind, body and spirit.

This conviction is supported by research. A landslide of scientific studies demonstrates a “positive association between being religious or spiritual and improved health, both in response to acute events and in chronic disease.” (Curr Pain Headache Rep 2006;10:41-6.) What was once considered “hocus pocus” is now proven scientific fact.



Just ask the 4,404 patients involved in a survey: 90.3 percent of whom believe prayer improved their health, say researchers (*Am J Health Promot* 2005;19:369-75).

Dr. Smith wants patients to be aware of the following ways a healthy spirit can contribute to a healthy body.

Cuts Cardiovascular Disease

Spirituality may warm the heart — and keep it functioning properly. One experiment conducted at Duke University Medical Center recruited 3,963 people, aged 65 years or older. Investigators found that subjects who attended religious services weekly and

prayed or studied scripture daily enjoyed a 40 percent reduced risk of elevated diastolic (bottom number) blood pressure, compared with subjects who did not regularly engage in religious activities.

However, not all religious pursuits lowered blood pressure. The study's authors noted that, “While most religious activity was associated with lower blood pressure, those who frequently watched religious TV or listened to religious radio actually had higher blood pressures.” (*Int J Psychiatry Med* 1998;28:189-213.)

Another way spirituality improves cardiovascular health is by lowering anxiety levels. In a study of 21 adult Hispanic women, researchers found that those with higher anxiety scores had lower spirituality scores. This factor, in addition to other cardiovascular risk factors shared by the group — including obesity, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes — raised the likelihood of heart disease and heart attack. Higher levels of spirituality, however, appear to lower the risk (*AAOHN J* 2006;54:120-8).

In addition, spirituality bolsters health by encouraging forgiveness. Holding grudges and refusing to forgive and forget past wrongs can spark high blood pressure and increase stress levels. By promoting a spirit of for-

giveness, spirituality also promotes physical healing.

Increases Life Expectancy

Patients work with Dr. Smith to add years to their life, and life to their years. Spiritual pursuits are one way to accomplish this.

Healthy people who regularly attend church services live up to 25 percent longer than those who don't (*Am Psychol* 2003;58:36).

According to a study in the journal *Demography*, which pooled data on more than 2,000 subjects, people who regularly attend religious services can expect to live seven years longer than individuals who do not partake in group worship (*Demography* 1999;36:273-85).

“Spirituality has been shown to reduce stress, promote healthy lifestyle choices and increase our feelings of belonging to a social network — all of which are associated with lower mortality,” explains Dr. Chandrakant Shah, professor of public health sciences at the University of Toronto.



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After reviewing data from Canada's National Population Health Survey and 42 other studies on the physical impact of spirituality, Dr. Shah concluded that up to 43,000 deaths each year in Canada — nearly 20 percent — may be attributable to low levels of spirituality.

“And we're talking about spirituality, not necessarily religiosity,” stresses Dr. Shah, who defines spirituality as “the beliefs and values a person holds concerning one's place in the universe and which reflect one's connections with a higher power and social and physical environments.”



Decreases Depression

A solid spiritual outlook may also help banish the blues.

In a study involving 151 female victims of domestic violence, researchers from Johns Hopkins University noted that 97 percent said spirituality or God was a source of strength or comfort for them. “Extent of religious involvement predicted increased psychological well-being and decreased depression. For women of color, greater religious involvement was also related to increased social support.” (*Violence Against Women* 2006;12:240-50.)

And, an inquiry of 99 college students revealed that students who reported that they were religious were 34 percent less likely to have mental health problems, compared with subjects who did not engage in spiritual pursuits (*Psychol Rep* 1999;85:1088).

Improves Cancer Survival Rates

Research shows that spirituality may

increase survival rates among women with breast cancer. “In a study of women with metastatic breast cancer, greater immunity was found to be associated among those who reported greater spirituality, as measured by frequency of attendance at religious services and importance of religious or spiritual expression.” (*Holist Nurs Pract* 2006;20:118.)

Deters Dementia

Research also shows that elderly people with dementia and a faith background are often able to respond to various rituals of their faith: verbally, physically and emotionally, even though they fail to recognize other everyday interactions. Common practices like familiar prayers, Bible readings, hymns and attendance at worship services — where collective memory is shared — can serve as memory joggers to reconnect people to their faith community and God (*Care Manag J* 2004;5:183-7).

Staves Off Substance Abuse

Individuals “low in spirituality” face a higher failure rate when it comes to treatment for substance abuse. But exposure to a program that emphasizes spirituality lowers that risk.

One study included 405 volunteers who reported problem drinking for an average of 20 years. In addition to various clinical aspects, their inpatient rehabilitation program included group discussions about spirituality, meetings with spiritual guides, periods of meditation and “private dialogues with a higher power.” (*J Stud Alcohol* 2006;67:600.)

The spiritual aspect of their treatment appeared to boost success. The researchers concluded that “these findings hint at the importance of spirituality in the environment of care.”

Tap Into Your Own Spirituality

The link between health and spirituality is undeniable. But what exactly is spirituality?

“Although universal consensus about a precise definition of spirituality does

not exist, commonalities among the various definitions can be discovered, including ways to find connectedness, direction, transcendence, meaning and purpose.” (*Holist Nurs Pract* 2006;20:118.)

Spiritual pursuits are not necessarily religious in nature.

Examples of spiritual pursuits include:

- Attending religious services
- Spending time in nature
- Prayer
- Meditation
- T'ai Chi and Yoga
- Journaling
- Reading inspirational books
- Listening to inspirational music
- Studying scripture
- Volunteer work

Because our chiropractic practice is committed to caring for the whole person and educating about the connection between the mind, body and spirit, we encourage patients to explore their spiritual sides. In the process of tapping into your spirituality, you'll also tap into your body's healing power and enhance the benefits of your chiropractic care.



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