

# Different strokes for married folks?

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"Love and marriage," sang philosopher Frank Sinatra, "is an institute you can't disparage." Especially, a new Tel Aviv University study suggests, when a happy marriage may help to prevent fatal strokes in men.

The first study of its kind to assess the quality of a marriage and its association with [stroke](#) risk,

Prof. Uri Goldbourt of Tel Aviv University's Neufeld Cardiac Institute found a correlation between reported "[happiness](#)" in marriage and the likelihood that a man will die from stroke. Drawn from data collected from 10,000 men, all of them civil servants, beginning in 1965, the research was presented to experts at the American Stroke Association's International Conference earlier this year.

In the retrospective study, men were surveyed about their happiness levels and [marital status](#); 34 years later, a follow-up study determined how many of the men died from stroke. Single men were found to have a 64% higher risk of a fatal stroke than married men. The quality of the marriage appeared to matter as well — men in an unhappy union had a 64% higher risk of a fatal stroke than those who reported being happy in their marriage.

## A foundation for future study

"The association we've found adjusts for factors such as age, blood type and cholesterol levels," Prof. Goldbourt notes, but he cautions that his results are only preliminary, taking into consideration only a few of many possible variables while laying the groundwork for future research.

The survey measured fatal strokes only, not those that were survived, for example. And similar data was not collected from women. "It's too bad we don't have that kind of information," Prof. Goldbourt notes.

Dr. Goldbourt hopes that his research will be taken up by younger researchers as a foundational study. While many studies today report the benefits of marriage, the negative effects of an unhappy marriage may be hidden. It is plausible, Prof. Goldbourt's study suggests, that a bad [marriage](#) is just as bad for one's health as not being married at all.

## Happiness is no magic bullet

Prof. Goldbourt describes his new research as "a hypothesis generator" instead of statistical proof, because only about 4% of the men reported being completely satisfied and happy in their [marriage](#). And the study didn't include follow-up research on the different kinds of strokes men can succumb to. "Happiness may very well likely create healthier [men](#) and reduce the risk of a fatal stroke," he says, "but we don't have all the information necessary to say that this is the magic bullet."

Previous medical studies have suggested that happiness can stave off the flu, promote positive cardiac health, and may even help people fight cancer. Much more research is needed on the happiness question, Prof. Goldbourt says, taking into account such factors as medication and the effects of happiness over time.

"We have opened a new channel of research into factors associated with death-by-stroke risk. Until that research is done, the best way to avoid one," Prof. Goldbourt concludes, "is still to maintain a healthy lifestyle."

Provided by Tel Aviv University

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