

# New relationship important for the mental health of widowers

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Men who have lost their partner to cancer and who are still single four to five years after their loss run a far greater risk of developing mental illness than those who have managed to find a new partner, reveals a unique study of 691 Swedish widowers carried out at the Sahlgrenska Academy.

More than 22,000 people die of cancer in Sweden each year. It has been scientifically proven that relatives of the deceased are at greater risk of dying themselves or developing mental and [physical illness](#), although studies have tended to focus on widows, and on the short-term risks.

## Unique long-term study

Researchers at the University of Gothenburg's Sahlgrenska Academy have now carried out a unique long-term study of 691 Swedish men who lost their wives to cancer. Part-funded by the Swedish Cancer Society and the Swedish Research Council, the study shows that widowers who had found a [new partner](#) four to five years after the death of their wife managed to deal with their loss relatively well.

## Sleeping pills and antidepressants

However, those who remained single were at far greater risk of developing depression, anxiety, [sleep disorders](#) and emotional blunting, and were also more likely to use [sleeping pills](#) and antidepressants.

## Long-term risk

"Previous studies have shown that people who lose their partner are at greater short-term [poor mental health](#)," says professor Gunnar Steineck who worked on the study. "Our study is the first to show that the risk of poor mental health last for many years but, on the average, the risk is restricted to those who don't find a new partner."

## Can your results be interpreted as proof that love heals?

"We need more research to understand the underlying mechanisms, but yes, [emotional support](#) from a new partner does probably help to process grief and protect against mental illness," says Steineck. "But it could also be the case that those men who cope best with their loss are more likely to show an interest in finding a new partner."

**More information:** The study has been published in the journal *Psycho-Oncology*. DOI: 10.1002/pon.2096

Provided by University of Gothenburg

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