

Religion, spirituality influence health in different but complementary ways

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Religion and spirituality have distinct but complementary influences on health, new research from Oregon State University indicates.

"Religion helps regulate behavior and [health habits](#), while spirituality regulates your emotions, how you feel," said Carolyn Aldwin, a gerontology professor in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at OSU.

Aldwin and colleagues have been working to understand and distinguish the beneficial connections between health, [religion](#) and spirituality. The result is a new theoretical model that defines two distinct pathways.

Religiousness, including formal religious affiliation and service attendance, is associated with better health habits, such as lower smoking rates and reduced alcohol consumption. Spirituality, including meditation and private prayer, helps regulate emotions, which aids physiological effects such as blood pressure.

The findings were published recently in the journal *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*. Co-authors were Crystal L. Park of the University of Connecticut, and Yu-Jin Jeong and Ritwik Nath of OSU. The research was supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

"No one has ever reviewed all of the different models of how religion affects health," said Aldwin, the Jo Anne Leonard endowed director of

OSU's Center for Healthy Aging Research. "We're trying to impose a structure on a very messy field."

There can be some overlap of the influences of religion and spirituality on health, Aldwin said. More research is needed to test the theory and examine contrasts between the two pathways. The goal is to help researchers develop better measures for analyzing the connections between religion, [spirituality](#) and [health](#) and then explore possible clinical interventions, she said.

Provided by Oregon State University

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