

Some partners need extra loving this Valentine's day

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(HealthDay)—The best gift you can give a stressed or depressed partner

this Valentine's Day is extra love and support, researchers say.

They surveyed more than 1,400 couples on self-esteem, levels of depression and mutual [support](#). The study revealed that when one [partner](#) was feeling stressed, support from their mate was associated with improved self-esteem and lower risk of depression in the future.

"Efforts from a partner to help alleviate stress may prevent the development or worsening of [mental health problems](#) and, in fact, could help keep the relationship healthy," said lead researcher Matthew Johnson. He's an assistant professor at the University of Alberta's Faculty of Agricultural, Life and Environmental Sciences, in Edmonton, Canada.

"When we experience stress, especially high levels of stress, we are particularly vulnerable and perhaps that's why partner support in those times is so impactful and long-lasting," Johnson said in a university news release.

The research found that men got a boost in their self-esteem when they supported their partner, which "made them feel better about themselves," said Johnson.

Women who received support from their partner had higher self-esteem and less depression in the future, according to the findings.

The study also found that women with higher self-esteem and men with fewer symptoms of depression received more support from their partners when facing stress.

Johnson noted that it can sometimes be difficult to give support to a partner when they really need it.

"When someone is depressed or has low self-worth, they may lash out. A partner offering support reaffirms feelings of [depression](#) and helplessness, of the feeling that they have to pick up the slack," Johnson said.

So, for Valentine's Day today and year-round, he suggested giving "invisible support" to a depressed or stressed partner.

"Studies suggest offering support your partner may not even be aware of, but would still be a helpful gesture, like taking care of a sink full of dirty dishes they haven't seen yet. You can offer support, just don't draw attention to it," Johnson said.

Other forms of support include simply listening or "handling the logistics of daily life by offering to take on tasks that aren't normally yours," such as planning meals or driving children to school, he said.

The study was published recently in the journal *Developmental Psychology*.

More information: The U.S. National Institute of Mental Health has more on [stress](#).

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