

Is venting good for your health?

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Venting—the release of negative, pent-up emotions—can feel good. But is it actually good for you? Or does it do more harm than good to dwell on negative thoughts and feelings?

Experts say that depends on a number of factors, including who's on the receiving end of a venting session, how often a person does it and what type of feedback they receive.

"By and large, we do need to get our [negative emotions](#) out," said Rachel Millstein, a staff psychologist in the behavioral medicine program and the Lifestyle Medicine Clinic at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. "The ways we do it, though, that's where it's healthy or unhealthy, productive or unproductive."

Why vent

Personal relationships, work, finances and discrimination are just some of the daily stressors that may fuel someone's need to vent. Research shows this kind of stress can raise the risk for [cardiovascular disease](#), whereas releasing or managing stress can improve physical and [psychological health](#), lowering that risk. Having a strong social support network has been linked to better psychological health.

Venting to people in that network is one way to reduce the impact of [daily stressors](#), said Millstein, also an assistant professor in the department of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School. "Calling a friend and letting it out can be helpful. It helps us feel connected to our social support networks, which is a big determinant of life satisfaction and overall well-being."

Choose your audience wisely

Speaking to someone who is supportive of your feelings can be helpful, even if that person offers a different perspective, she said.

But venting to someone who is dismissive of your feelings can be

detrimental, said Jonathan Shaffer, an associate professor of clinical health psychology at the University of Colorado in Denver. "It's invalidating to share and get no response from the other person. It might make you feel like you don't have worth or are not loveable."

Venting also can be counter-productive if the listener amplifies negative feelings and "the conversation spirals. Then you can pull each other down," Millstein said.

Another negative consequence could be if the listener gets tired of listening. "If you vent over and over again, this person might not want to be present, and this can fray a social connection," she said.

For major stressors, it might be more helpful to speak to a therapist, Shaffer said.

Venting without an audience

If speaking feelings aloud to someone else feels unsafe, another alternative is to write them down, Shaffer said.

Studies have found numerous health benefits to expressive writing, the practice of writing down feelings on a daily basis. It has been shown to aid in healing from traumatic experiences and to help [lower blood pressure](#), boost the [immune system](#), improve sleep and lessen depression and pain.

Don't forget the positive

Whether releasing feelings on paper or in person, Shaffer suggests finding ways to focus on the positive, as well as the negative. For example, ending a venting session with a focus on things for which the

person is grateful can help restore positive [feelings](#), he said, as can mindfulness practices.

"Make a plan for some type of relaxation, such as deep breathing or meditation afterwards," he suggested.

Other ways to relieve stress

Exercise also can relieve stress and release [negative feelings](#), Millstein said.

"And don't forget that humor is a really good coping strategy, too," she said. Venting to a friend with a good sense of humor may be twice as helpful, because "sometimes other people can help us see the funny side of things."

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