

SOURCE LINES

High Social Support and Stress Resistance: The Connection

Dr. Michael Meaney is a biochemist who has researched the connection between stress and disease. Dr. Meaney's research indicates that those people most resistant to stress-induced illness

- Are young, healthy adults.
- Are high in social support.
- Have efficient behavioural and biological responses to stress.
- Have no genetic predisposition for disease.
- Eat a good diet (protein, low fat, vitamins).

It is Dr. Meaney's opinion that of the above, "high social support" is probably the single most important protective factor for preventing stress related illnesses.

People with "low social support" feel they can turn to few people in their lives in times of stress. Their social isolation puts them at risk for stress-induced illnesses like heart disease, stroke, and cancer. If you feel you can turn to few people in your life consider the following possibilities

- Join a support group.
- Find friendship along with spiritual support
- Take a class through a continuing education program in your community.
- Join a health club.
- Volunteer time helping others through a local Volunteer Organization.

If all of this seems too much because you don't know where to begin to make steps toward becoming more a part of your community there is good news. Shy people can learn to manage their shyness and become more engaged with others. Over time their shyness becomes a smaller part of who they are. Chronically cranky or angry people whose behaviour has cut them off from the support of family and friends can learn to behave in ways that reconnect them to supportive relationships. Most depressed individuals can learn to "undo" their depression and become active in establishing supportive relationships.

If you think you are a person with low social support and would like to find out what changes you could make to make your life more fulfilling and stress resistant consider contacting your Employee Assistance Counsellor.

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