

The Social Behaviour Linked To Longer Life (M)



This social behaviour reduces the risk of top killers such as cancer and cardiovascular disease.

Giving social support to others may be just as important to health as receiving it, a study concludes.

Being able to call on support from others has long been linked to health benefits.

However, giving support to others also has considerable benefits, indeed it may be necessary to get the full benefits.

People in the study who said they had friends to lean on and, in turn, their friends could lean on them had lower levels of inflammation in their bodies, suggesting better health.

Mr Tao Jiang, the study's first author, said:

"Positive relationships may be associated with lower inflammation only for those who believe they can give more support in those relationships."

The study included over one thousand middle-aged to older people in the U.S..

They were asked about their social integration: whether they were married, how often they attended social activities and so on.

They were also asked who they could rely on and who could rely on them in case of need.

The results suggested that mutual support produces the most healing relationships.

The best support is two-way, said Dr Baldwin Way, study co-author:

"It may be that when people believe they can give more support to friends and family, these relationships are especially rewarding and stress-relieving, which reduces inflammation."

The study tracked a marker of inflammation in the blood called interleukin-6.

Dr Way explained:

"Higher levels of IL-6 are associated with increased risk for many of the diseases that are the top killers of Americans, including cardiovascular disease and cancer.

That's why we thought it was important to find out why previous studies found such weak evidence for the link between social support and lower inflammation."

The findings suggest that mutual support may be particularly important for women.

Mr Jiang said:

"This reflects the idea that social relationships are often seen as more important for women than for men.

But our sample size was not large enough to show that conclusively.

We need to study that issue further.”