Dear Health Enthusiast

We sincerely wish that all of you have a peaceful and meaningful holiday experience. However, for some of our readers this time of the year is especially lonely and sad as they have experienced hurts and loss during the past year. In this month’s feature article, Elizabeth Hall outlines and explains the 8 steps involved in extending forgiveness. You won’t want to miss the stories of three brave women. Want to improve your brain muscle health? Then our short article section is for you.

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Free at Last! The Healing Process of Forgiveness

Forgiveness Promotes Health

Studies show that people who forgive, as contrasted to those who harbor grudges and anger, have slower heart rates, lower blood pressures, improved sleep, and less stress and depression. They have less somatic complaints like headaches and muscle pains. They generally have better working relationships with others than those who do not forgive. In contrast, holding a grudge places a significant amount of stress on your body just as any major stressful event would. Just imaging forgiving an offender significantly improves blood flow to the pre-frontal cortex, the CEO of the brain.

Unresolved Conflict Erodes Health

True story 70 years ago. Catherine, I shall call her, was from a wealthy family in Europe. She had come to the United States many years ago and experienced two unfortunate marriages. Now her current marriage was in deep trouble as well. A bleeding stomach ulcer brought her to an institution of healing in the South. She did not want surgery. With her physician’s help, she worked through the problems in her marriage, as well as many other issues in her personal life. But in spite of all the treatments, counseling, and her own persistence, she was still no better physically.

“Catherine,” her doctor said, “you have worked so hard on your problems. Is there anything else that might be troubling you?”

“I can’t think of a single thing.”

Her doctor was ready to schedule her for surgery when in the middle of the night he was urgently called to her room. Catherine was pacing violently back and forth, hands clenched, hissing, “I hate her!”

“Catherine, whom do you hate? Why?”

Her doctor waited patiently, and after some time she told him what had happened. Her grandparents were members of European nobility. Their only son had had a child out of wedlock – Catherine. What rearing she had received had been from her grandfather, who truly loved her. But her grandmother openly resented and hated her. She had had no communication with her grandparents for years.

Just that night her grandmother had called. “Your grandfather has died. It is your fault. You killed him.”

“I killed him? How?”

“Because you left the faith of your family and espoused another religion!”

This reopened all of the pain and suppressed resentment Catherine had harbored toward her grandmother. Now the cause of her physical problems was finally revealed.

When Catherine, after much prayer and counsel, was able to forgive her grandmother and write her a gracious, loving letter, she stopped bleeding and her ulcer healed completely.

The Steps to Forgiveness

Step 1: Define what forgiveness is and what it is not.

What Forgiveness is NOT:
As we look deeper into the incredible power to forgive, we first need to define what forgiveness is, and what it is not. When we have unrealistic expectations of what forgiveness is, we may become frustrated in trying to achieve the unachievable, suffer unnecessary guilt, or experience crushed hopes for future meaningful relationships.

**Forgiveness is not a superficial acceptance of a superficial apology in order to be conciliatory and escape a painful confrontation of serious, recurring issues.** Conciliation is valuable, but not at the expense of truth and sincerity. True forgiveness recognizes that there might or might not be reconciliation. Our demands are surrendered, but not our hope for understanding and a stronger relationship. Forgiveness is a prelude to reconciliation but does not necessarily guarantee it. In healthy forgiveness, we take action regardless of the response of the offender. I can choose to forgive even if a heart-felt apology is not offered. However, in order for us to be truly reconciled, the offender must to some extent recognize the damage his offense has done, be genuinely sorry, confess his offense, and seek to make restitution for it. I also must see what I have done to contribute to the problem. Although I always need to accept genuine guilt on my part, apologize, and seek to be forgiven, I must not withhold forgiveness even if the offender demonstrates no desire for reconciliation, fails to acknowledge his wrongs, or shows no interest in achieving a better relationship.

**Forgiveness does not require us to forgo wise boundary-setting.** If we fail to set appropriate boundaries, our emotional resources can be quickly overwhelmed. Appropriate boundaries also help prevent unnecessary leaks of emotional energy so that we can then spend more resources in coping with other life issues. Judicious boundary-setting helps others know where we stand and reduces inadvertent mistakes that sap our day-to-day coping abilities.

** Forgiveness does not free us from accountability or necessarily cancel out consequences.** As children, we learn that accountability and consequential learning help us to grow in integrity. At other times, however, forgiveness might include modification of consequences or even appropriate legal action. Accountability belongs to both the offender and the offended. For example: I am driving to town in the correct lane and respecting the speed limits and the stop lights. A drunk driver hits me, and I become paralyzed from the waist down. Because he broke the law, he is responsible for the injury and appropriate restitution of medical expenses and disability. However, I am responsible for processing my anger and the depression that may result from the accident.

**What Forgiveness IS**

Forgiveness includes a conscious refusal of letting past hurts negatively shape our present and future course of action and sink us into bitterness. While we become sometimes aware of harmful actions done to us, they do not occupy the uppermost part of our being. Although we still may hold the offender accountable for his action, we do not seek revenge. We choose to let go of the anger we have for those who have injured us.

Extending forgiveness for life’s painful experiences is a process that requires constant and persistent effort. Though it can be instantaneous, it is not always a one-time act. Often, as God works in our lives and uncovers more damage done to us, another layer of anger surfaces, and we are confronted with the choice to forgive again, this time more deeply.

**Step 2: Recognize the damage done by the offender.** We hate pain. We unconsciously repress it and consciously suppress it until it insidiously depresses our very being. We become obsessed with seeking comfort rather than grappling with truth and grace whereby we can be healed. Comfort then becomes our god in the place of truth. However, Scripture tells us that God is a God of truth and graciousness, and genuine comfort can develop only in the context of these attributes freely extended to us by our loving Creator. We can forgive only when we progress honestly and purposefully into the domain of truth. This requires a recognition and acceptance of our personal experience.

*When we deny the pain from life’s hurts, we set ourselves up for more pain.* Many, many years ago, after I delivered a lecture on stress, a patient asked to see me. I will call her Rosalyn. Rosalyn was an attractive, street-smart, middle-aged European lady. She told me how as a child she had lived in a Nazi-occupied country, and even though she had been only three years old, she would deliver underground secrets that she obtained from her parents to another underground agent in the big city.

Now in her fifties and enjoying financial prosperity, she had nevertheless been in several abusive relationships with men. During this time, she met her brother whom she had not seen since soon after the war. They reminisced about old times, and finally she remarked, “Hans, there is one thing I do not understand. I remember waking up black and blue on several occasions. Mother said it was because I fell out of the bed. But I don’t remember falling out of the bed at all.”

“You don’t remember Dad beating you! Mom just told you that. Dad really beat you!” Her brother couldn’t believe she didn’t remember.

As she told me her story, I looked into Rosalyn’s eyes – no tears. Her experience was told very matter-of-factly. I was the one with tears...
and a big lump in my throat. I could not swallow. Rosalyn then remarked, “But my dad wouldn’t have done it if he had not been captured by the Nazis and placed in a concentration camp.” Probably true. Maybe it was a wise reflection from a mature lady and a legitimate groping toward forgiving.

However, at the time of the abuse, the little girl didn’t understand. It was such a painful affront to her young soul that her consciousness would not tolerate it. Did her Dad’s abuse set her up for her future relationships with abusive men? As I listened to the rest of her story I concluded that it probably had contributed to it. I realized that her persistence and indomitable spirit had deteriorated into a toughness that would not consciously allow her childhood memories to cry and be validated. Without that validation her forgiveness would only be superficial, and it would be difficult (if not impossible) for her to grow. Only as we acknowledge our pain can we begin to understand some of the ungodly strategies we have devised to numb the pain and choose a more godly approach.

**Step 3. Beware of bird nests!** While forgiveness includes the recognition of hurt and injury with its accompanying pain, it refuses to dwell upon and nourish the injury. A proverb counsels, “You can’t prevent birds from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from nesting in your hair.” Anger and the ensuing bitterness lead us to engage in selective filtering. We become absorbed with a person’s or situation’s problems to the exclusion of the good and the possible benefits that could be derived from them. Might it not help us to think of a person’s good qualities as well as their offensive ones? Perhaps we could learn to triumph in a difficult situation. Perhaps we could benefit from counsel that sees the larger picture.

**Step 4. Remove weeds by their roots.** True forgiveness involves a commitment to work through the roots of bitterness. Wendy was a highly efficient surgical technician – but she was tough. She had a good heart at times. She ministered to the orphans in the village and some legitimate points. She knew she had a lot of bitterness and shame from being sexually abused as a child. That bitterness and shame finally adopted a child who became her pride and joy. But whenever there were misunderstandings at work with any man, she would go off

Wendy was attributing to every man the abuse she received from and the contempt she developed for her mother’s boyfriends who raped and abused her as a child. Since men had abused her in the past, there was no way any man would dare do it again. Her wall of contempt rose to protect herself from insult and assault. However, contempt preempts forgiveness.

**Step 5. Conscientiously choose not to allow past hurts, abuses, or injuries to motivate us in a negative, stunted, or suspicious way.** (Caution, however, can be a valuable asset.) We determine to open our hearts and lives, risking our talents, in a godly way, in order to become the person God wants us to be.

Without forgiving, our hurt decays into bitterness. These roots of bitterness pervert our perception and discernment. Anger and bitterness are projected onto others. By contaminating our relationships, they rob us of peace, good-will, and a meaningful and blessed involvement with others. We become insensitive. We want to be tough and inaccessible to pain. But unless we can accept our own vulnerability and need, we can’t accept others when they are vulnerable and needy. The relationships we do have become self-focused and more bitterness ensues. In order to help others, we must recognize and avoid generalizations.

**Step 6. Reject the value the offender placed upon us at the time of the injury.** Often a child will internalize the value his parents or others in his life have placed upon him. For example, early sexual abuse appraises the child’s worth as cheap. Another example would be that sometimes a parent’s indifference toward their child can be mirrored later on in their adolescent’s indifference to opportunities.

Consider the following scenario. The parents of eight-year-old Jim are divorced. His dad promises to see him on Saturdays, but seldom comes. The child thinks, “I must not be worth anything or else Dad would surely come.” In later years, he sinks into deep dejection whenever his preoccupied boss does not acknowledge him. The boss, with his mind crammed full with other problems, doesn’t mean to discourage his worker. The indifference Jim received from his dad is now projected onto his boss, and if he doesn’t take time to process his hurt and heal his wound, it will compromise his relationships with others and his job performance in the future.

**Step 7. Consciously rejecting the negative value that the abuser or indifferent parent has placed on our lives, and replacing it with God’s love, speeds forgiveness and healing.**

A true story illustrates this profound point. Dorie was conceived out-of-wedlock, but her parents later married. She was not a cute child. With disgust her mother often hid her in a drawer or a closet. Finally, her mother couldn’t stand her anymore and sent her off to an orphanage. Tragically, the matron of the orphanage would take some of the girls down to a basement room and rape them. Dorie was one of them. She was slammed against the walls until she cooperated.
When she was twelve years old, a group of college students came and spoke about a loving God. Her hungry heart responded to Him the best it could. Those were the days when orphans were sent to foster homes when they turned thirteen. Dorie was assigned to different foster homes where women would beat her; their husbands or hired hands would enter her room at night, make her undress, and force her to participate in sexual acts. However, she persevered and claimed a few promises from her New Testament. Sometimes God protected her, at other times He did not seem to, but her faith still clung to Him.

Eventually she located her father and began communicating with him. However, when he discovered she was going to marry a Christian and go overseas to do ministry, he disowned her. Later, when she attempted to attend his funeral, his relatives and friends rejected her. Nonetheless, in spite of all the rejection, trauma, and various abuses, today Dorie has still found life worth living and rewarding, and she now engages in helping wounded souls.

**Step 8. Recognize that real forgiveness trusts God’s justice instead of our own vengeance.** God is love, but He is just and fair as well. Indeed, justice is an aspect of His love; without it, His love is compromised. His power to bring final deliverance to this pain-racked world would be non-existent without justice and judgment. A close study of the Psalms and the Old Testament prophets reveals a God who hates violence, deceit, unkindness, and oppression. He is now in the process of delivering His people from every trace of these attributes so that when He comes again He can apply the finishing touch of immortality that will remove the scars these have caused.

This was again illustrated by Dorie’s story. Years later while she was visiting the West Coast, her accompanying daughter wanted to visit the orphanage where her mother grew up. The orphanage had been remodeled into an art school and the present teachers were accustomed to previous residents of the orphanage coming by. Dorie, always loving to entertain, told stories of her childhood as she went from room to room. However, when the guide beckoned them to the very end of the hallway, she refused to go. Her daughter couldn’t understand why.

The guide gently placed her hand upon Dorie’s as if to say, “I understand. I know what was done there.”

“Will you come, please? Can you tell us what happened here?”

“This is the room where sexual abuse took place,” Dorie answered, painfully remembering. The guide opened the door. The room had been remodeled.

“Do you know why this room has been renovated?” the woman asked Dorie. She explained further, “Because years ago it caught fire.”

“The judgment of God!” Dorie responded impulsively. The fire seemed to have cleansed the room, ominously foreshadowing the final termination of the controversy between good and evil. It was a stark reminder that good will ultimately triumph over evil. Evil will finally be eradicated. One glorious day the entire universe will be clean, and one united pulse of glad harmony and pure love will beat forever throughout the earth made new. Fellowship today with our Creator and Redeemer as we anticipate that soon-to-come reality will truly sustain us through each day of suffering that we may be called to endure during our brief lives here. His gentleness and grace are sufficient for each day’s need until that blessed tomorrow when the sweet promise will at last be realized; “There will be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.” (Rev 21:4)

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www.health.harvard.edu/press release/power of forgiveness
Don’t Let Your Brain Shrink!

By: Helen Berne Jacobs

Both obesity and diabetes cause a clear reduction in brain size without additional contributing factors. The frontal lobes – the CEO of the brain, the hippocampus, so important to memory and mood, the cingulated gyrus, important in adaptability to new situations, are especially vulnerable. A BMI of 30 or higher has been linked with a decline in the executive function such as focusing, planning, monitoring, energizing, cause-to-effect reasoning, and self-control. Unfortunately, this brain atrophy can begin in adolescent years if the teenager has both obesity and type 2 diabetes. Two caveats here: Even for individuals who do not have diabetes or prediabetes, those with higher normal blood sugar levels are more susceptible to memory problems. Daily exercise may reverse some brain shrinkage. The good news is that lifestyle programs (such as Wildwood Lifestyle Center conducts) can help to reverse type 2 diabetes while promoting optimal brain health.

Works Cited:


Seven Strategies to Prevent a Sagging Muscle Economy

How you manage your muscles now might affect your future more than you realize! Because muscle strength is directly associated with functionality and independence, shrinking skeletal muscle mass can lead to declining health. Age-related loss of muscle is closely related to loss of bone tissue. And decreased muscle mass and function can significantly contribute both to disabilities and several major chronic diseases. Obviously, muscles are for more than display! Their health is fundamentally connected to our wellbeing. Ready for a lifestyle program that reduces muscle loss and increases the enjoyment of your life? Stay tuned!

1. Get enough vitamin D and sunshine. Exercise in sunlight improves muscle strength more than exercise indoors. Vitamin D hormone (calcitriol) also helps preserve the function of fast muscle fibers. This contribution aids in preserving muscle strength and reducing falls.

2. Rejuvenate by exercise. Skeletal muscles shrink when they are not used. This atrophy is also accompanied by a marked decrease in collagen formation. (Collagen is the primary protein found in tendons and bones). Exercise not only stimulates protein synthesis in the muscles, but in tendons as well.

Researchers at the Buck Institute for Age Research found that the muscles of older adults were, on average, about 59 percent weaker than those of the younger subjects. There was also a dramatic decline in the capacity of muscle cells’ powerhouses (mitochondria) to produce energy. After 6 months of exercise training, the muscle strength in the older individuals improved 21 percent. They found regular exercise increases the capacity of the muscle cells’ power plants to produce more energy and reduces inflammatory activity in skeletal muscles. The good news is that brisk walking or physically working for at least 30 minutes a day can extend abundant living well into the golden years.

3. Engage in resistance exercise. Resistance training (RT) consists of repetitious exercises with weights, resistance bands, weight machines, or even one’s own body weight. It increases growth hormone, which improves protein synthesis in muscle and bone, and muscle strength. In conjunction with an adequate protein intake, it helps older people gain muscle strength and size. RT also prevents decline in skeletal muscle mass and function when the mechanical stimuli provided by the tasks of daily living are not sufficient to offset these age-related declines. Adults who do not perform RT often experience a 50 percent reduction in fast-twitch fibers by 80 years of age. On the other hand, individuals who do resistance-training exercises can actually experience increases in muscle strength, function, and mass well into their 90s! RT also improves balance in frail elderly individuals. Just one caution here: If you are not used to exercise, build up your muscles first by engaging in modest aerobic exercise and stretching. Be sure to discuss with your doctor any exercise precautions and limitations if you have a medical condition before performing resistant exercise. Know your limits!

4. Get proper amounts of protein. Inadequate protein intake eventually causes the loss of fat-free mass, muscle strength, and size. A high protein diet, on the other hand, is also harmful; it can increase myostatin, a protein factor which inhibits muscle growth.

5. Enjoy orange and green vegetables. Recent epidemiological studies show that low serum or plasma carotenoids in community-dwelling, older adults are independently associated with low skeletal-muscle strength and the development of walking disability. A tasty solution? Bring on those carotenoid-rich carrots, yams, and collards

6. Keep your blood sugar within normal range. Both chemical measurement and actual biopsy of diabetic individuals reveal significant problems. Loss of fast muscle fibers results in an increased risk both for muscle fatigue and for falling. Diabetes also decreases skeletal muscle contractility, induces atrophy, and reduces the ability of the muscle cells to regenerate.

7. Don’t smoke. Smoking causes muscle fiber atrophy. Unfortunately, it also acutely and adversely affects small blood vessels by decreasing the production of nitric oxide, a molecule that helps them to dilate. Less dilation results in a decreased supply of oxygen to muscle cells. This is seen in research demonstrating that exercise-induced vasodilatation is lower in smokers during physical activity.
compared to non-smokers. Even in healthy young adults, exposure to tobacco smoke impairs the ability of the arteries to dilate.

8. Don’t drink alcohol. Alcohol consumption, like smoking, compromises the cellular proteins and depresses protein synthesis in skeletal muscles.

**Works Cited.**


