

THE Power OF FORGIVENESS

Forgiving someone who hurt you deeply can be one of the hardest things to do. But holding a grudge may be bad for your health. Letting go of resentment and the desire for revenge has several health benefits. For cancer patients, forgiveness means they can focus on healing instead of the negativity of past wrongs.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FORGIVE?

Forgiveness is a **decision to let go** of resentment, desire for revenge and ill-will toward the person who wronged you.

Forgiveness is a **natural resolution of the grief process.**

Forgiveness is not the same as reconciliation:

- Reconciliation is the coming together of two people in mutual respect. It requires both parties working together.
- Forgiveness is entirely up to you.
- It's possible to forgive without re-establishing or continuing the relationship.

Forgiveness is not forgetting:

- Forgetting a wrong might lead you to deny or suppress feelings about it.

Forgiveness is not condoning or excusing:

- Forgiveness does not minimize, justify or excuse the wrong that was done.

Forgiveness is a **choice we make for our own well-being.** It does not depend on an apology from the person who wronged you.

Forgiveness **brings peace** that helps you go on with your life.

WHAT ARE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF HOLDING A GRUDGE?

Being hurt by someone you love and trust might make you feel angry, sad or confused. Dwelling on hurtful events or situations may lead to:

Resentment **Sense of injustice** **Hostility**

Holding a grudge affects our cardiovascular and nervous systems. Researchers found that people had increases in their heart rates, blood pressure and muscle tension when they thought about being wronged. They also felt less in control. Forgiveness can reverse the effects of holding a grudge.

Bitterness **Vengeance**

WHAT ARE THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF FORGIVENESS?

According to research, people who forgive are more likely to have:

- Fewer episodes of depression
- Higher self-esteem
- More friends
- Healthier relationships
- Longer marriages
- Lower blood pressure
- Less anxiety, stress and hostility
- Closer relationships
- Fewer stress-related health issues
- Better immune system function
- Lower rates of heart disease
- Lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse
- Greater spiritual and psychological well-being

Those who forgive are more likely to be happy, serene, empathetic, hopeful and agreeable. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you.

HOW TO FORGIVE?

Forgiveness is a process of change. By letting go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt.

- **Consider the value of forgiveness** and its importance in your life.
- **Reflect on the facts of the situation**, how you've reacted and how this combination has affected your life, health and well-being.
- When you're ready, **choose to forgive the person** who's wronged you.
- **Step out of your role** as victim.
- **Release the control and power** the hurtful person or situation had in your life.

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SOURCES: PBS, Mayo Clinic

For more information, call 1-800-296-9333.