

A strong, happy relationship good for your health

I'm in my 50s and am happily married. I keep hearing younger people in my social circle question whether marriage is really important. Am I just old-fashioned? Or does marriage still have inherent value?

Well, the answer might be “yes” to both.

Trends in recent years indicate that younger Americans are much slower to tie the knot than they used to be. In fact, an analysis of the most recent U.S. census data by the Pew Research Center revealed that just 51 percent of all U.S. adults were married in 2010, down from 72 percent in 1960. Though declines were seen in all age groups, the most striking was in adults ages 18 to 29: Just 20 percent were married in 2010, compared with 59 percent in 1960.

So, maybe you are old-fashioned. But does that mean marriage has less value today? Not necessarily. In fact, there's plenty of research suggesting that stable marriages are good for adults, children and society as a whole. It could be that this holds true for any stable, committed relationship — and perhaps that's what many of those unmarried 20-somethings are betting on. For example, there's already evidence that children raised in stable two-parent households have the same rates of well-being, traditionally married or not.

The nonprofit Healthy Relationships California (<http://www.relationshipsca.org>) recently launched an effort to help spread the word. Among the free resources available is a series of research briefs on the links between



a happy, healthy relationship and health, parenting, children's success and social impact:

- Many studies indicate happy couples tend to have better health. For example, those who are married have a lower risk of heart attacks than those who aren't, and outcomes for cancer treatment are statistically better for married people. But, an unhappy marriage can increase the chance of illness by 35 percent and shorten life span by four years.

- Happy couples have fewer symptoms of depression and have better overall emotional well-being. Not surprisingly, research shows that dysfunctional relationships tend to have the opposite effect.

- Children in intact families tend to have better attendance, higher grades and lower dropout rates than children with divorced or single parents.

- Children in intact families also are less likely to live in poverty, are less likely to use drugs, cigarettes and alcohol, and are less likely to engage in criminal or delinquent behavior or early sexual activity.

It seems a strong, healthy relationship is hard to beat. While marriage isn't for everyone — and not all relationships can (or should) be saved — Ohio State University Extension offers free relationship resources on communication, finances, and relationship and parenting issues that couples could find helpful. Go to <http://go.osu.edu/couples>.

Family Fundamentals is a monthly column on family issues. It is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Family Fundamentals, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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Dear Subscriber: This column was reviewed by Kara Newby, family life program coordinator for Ohio State University Extension in Ohio State's College of Education and Human Ecology.

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