

## **Marriage in Old Age**

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As closely interactive cohorts throughout their adult lives, husbands and wives have been seen to become even closer confidants and partners in older age. These changes may predominate after retirement and the loss of daily work practices and professional systems. Older couples have frequently shared a considerable quantity of time with one another, and subsequently are able to call forth collective memories and years of intercommunications. In addition, older adult couples usually report less conflicts, and appear to acquire more meaning out of their spousal relationships. They also report less psychological distress and rates of illness than older singles. These benefits appear to be chiefly noticeable in later life.

Thus, despite the common belief that older adult couples are cantankerous and unhappy, research shows that this is not necessarily true. It appears that older couples argue less and the conflicts that have existed earlier in the marriage may no longer be an issue. Currently, most of their stressful responsibilities of children or careers have diminished. In their reflections, many have reported that during the birth of their children is where there was the greatest dissatisfaction. During this time there were disagreements regarding child-rearing and then again during adolescence. Responsibility of the children generally fell on the mother, which infers that these gender roles lead to their martial displeasure.

Although the children were not the only source of their anxiety, it was stated that once the adult children left home older couples regained contentment. One would think that since some parents stay together because of the children, their parents may divorce after the young

adults are on their own. However, in some cases the opposite proved true in which the older couples, as years past, grew fonder towards each other over time. It appeared that they resolved problems more quickly and provided more comfort to each other. Many older adult couples either sorted through their issues, or no longer found them worth discussing. It was also noted that even when upset with one another, most would add a kind word or a nicety in speaking with or about their spouses.

Furthermore, several studies demonstrated that through the progression of marriage into later years, older couples lessened their social activities. Therefore, as those other activities dwindled, the older couple focused on building a stronger emotional relationship. Healthy marriages in old age have the possibility of increasing this type of support and increasing positivity, even if they are not cognizant of it. Some of the frequent terms used to describe their lasting connection included compromise, individualism, joint interests, and commitment. When happily married couples were queried about what they thought was imperative to their successful marriage, both the husband and wife stated that it helps to be married to your best friend. Thus, companionship and emotional support become a more important aspect in the marriage.

As the couple grows older, partners must also assist one another in dealing with challenging role transitions when coping with declining health, emotional or physical illness of either spouse, increased dependency, and when handling illness or death of friends. Since health-related issues is one of the central concerns for older couples, adequate socioeconomic resources in older age might support the couples' adaptation to these trials, relieving some of the burden on the relationship. Subsequently, the quality of the marriage preceding an illness affects the caregiving experience. Therefore, an older person in a mutually loving relationship stands to

lose the affection and support they received from his/her spouse in addition to consuming the new strains of caregiving.

### **Further Reading**

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