



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AMERICA
GREEK ORTHODOX LADIES PHILOPTOCHOS SOCIETY, INC.
126 East 37th Street • New York, NY 10016 • 212.977.7770 • www.philoptochos.org
Confidential Social Work Tel: 212.977.7782 • socialwork@philoptochos.org



How Spirituality Can Benefit Mental and Physical Health

<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-spirituality-can-benefit-mental-and-physical-health-3144807>

By Elizabeth Scott, MS Updated on March 13, 2020

While people use many different religions and paths to find God or to express their spirituality, research has shown that those who are more religious or spiritual and use their spirituality to cope with life, experience many benefits to their health and well-being.¹

For many, this news would come as no surprise; spirituality and religious activity have been a source of comfort and relief from stress for multitudes of people. In fact, according to a study from the University of Florida in Gainesville and Wayne State University in Detroit, older adults use prayer more than any other alternative therapies for health; 96% of study participants use prayer specifically to cope with stress.

SPIRITUALITY'S POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON HEALTH

While specific spiritual views are a matter of faith, research has examined whether the benefits of spirituality and spiritual activity are provable facts. The results may surprise no one who has found comfort in their religious or spiritual views, but they are definitely noteworthy in that they demonstrate in a scientific way that these activities do work for many people.

Here are just a few more of the many positive findings related to spirituality and its influence on physical and mental health:

- Canadian college students who are involved with campus ministries visited the doctor less. They also scored higher on tests of **psychological well-being** and **coped with stress** more effectively.
- Older women are more grateful to God than older men, and they receive greater **stress-buffering health effects** due to this gratitude.²
- Those with an intrinsic religious orientation, regardless of gender, exhibited **less physiological reactivity toward stress** than those with an extrinsic religious orientation.
- They were also **less afraid of death** and had **greater feelings of well-being**. (Those who were intrinsically oriented dedicated their lives to God or a 'higher power,' while the extrinsically oriented ones used religion for external ends like making friends or increasing community social standing.)

This, along with other research, demonstrates that there may be tangible and lasting benefits to maintaining involvement with a spiritual community. This involvement, along with the gratitude that can accompany spirituality, can be a buffer against stress and is linked to greater levels of physical health.

Dedication to God or a "higher power" translated into less stress reactivity, greater feelings of well-being, and ultimately even a decreased fear of death.

People who feel comfortable and comforted using spirituality as a coping mechanism for stress can rest assured that there's even more evidence that this is a good idea for them.

PRAYER WORKS FOR YOUNG AND OLD ALIKE.

Prayer and spirituality have been linked to:

- Better health
- Less hypertension
- Less stress, even during difficult times³
- More positive feelings
- Less depression⁴
- Greater psychological well-being
- Superior ability to handle stress

FINAL THOUGHTS

Religious faith also benefits caregivers. In a study of caregivers of patients with Alzheimer disease or terminal cancer, caregivers with a strong personal religious faith and many social contacts were better able to cope with the stresses of caregiving during a 2-year period. ⁶

Whether this information inspires you to rediscover a forgotten spiritual path, reinforces your commitment to an already well-established one, or simply provides interesting food for thought, this is just a sample of the research that's been done on the topic.

Spirituality is a very personal experience, and everyone's spiritual path may be unique.

1. Akbari M, Hossaini SM. The Relationship of Spiritual Health with Quality of Life, Mental Health, and Burnout: The Mediating Role of Emotional Regulation. *Iran J Psychiatry.* 2018;13(1):22-31.
2. Manning LK. Spirituality as a lived experience: exploring the essence of spirituality for women in late life. *Int J Aging Hum Dev.* 2012;75(2):95-113. doi:10.2190/AG.75.2.a
3. Wachholtz AB, Sambamthoori U. National trends in prayer use as a coping mechanism for depression: changes from 2002 to 2007. *J Relig Health.* 2013;52(4):1356-68. doi:10.1007/s10943-012-9649-y
4. Johnson KA. Prayer: A Helpful Aid in Recovery from Depression. *J Relig Health.* 2018;57(6):2290-2300. doi:10.1007/s10943-018-0564-8
5. Gonçalves JP, Lucchetti G, Menezes PR, Vallada H. Religious and spiritual interventions in mental health care: a systematic review and meta-analysis of randomized controlled clinical trials. *Psychol Med.* 2015;45(14):2937-49. doi:10.1017/S0033291715001166
6. <https://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/geriatrics/social-issues-in-older-adults/religion-and-spirituality-in-older-adults>