

## Features

---

November 30, 2008

### Try A Little Forgiveness 101

When it comes to health issues, people are willing to consider almost anything: Oat bran, tomatoes, broccoli, and sprouts of all kinds. If there's a study that says one dietary addition or another will tip that crucial balance between living and merely existing, or staying young forever and growing old, most people will try it.

And, any casual television watcher can attest to the number of exercise programs and infomercials that claim one regimen or another will tighten this, lift that, or improve something else. We are hoping to magically melt away all those lumps/bumps on our body that we hate.

For Dr. Frederic Luskin, a researcher at Stanford University who specializes in the connection between spirituality and health, all that so-called expert advice is all very well and good. But, he says one of the most critical elements of health has nothing to do with what we put in our bodies or what we do to them. He, and his colleagues, say that kindness can be a cure in itself--both for people who are themselves in need of healing and the people in their lives.

Dr. Luskin, who runs the Stanford Forgiveness Project, is studying how forgiveness can help people become healthy. He has found that letting go of the hurt caused by other people, or by forces we see as being outside ourselves, has translated into real results. The volunteers in the program (who had unresolved, interpersonal hurt that **did not** include physical or sexual violence) say they don't just feel better emotionally, they feel better physically, as well.

In the beginning, everyone wondered why he was studying forgiveness and health. His answer was that it is a universal phenomena that most people are being ticked off and angry about someone or something every day. Unfortunately, though, the skills to forgive are inadequately taught and people hold on to the anger for too long. Eventually it affects a person's emotional and physical health. For example, studies have shown that while anger can damage your heart, learning to let go of anger and forgive can actually help improve general health in heart attack victims. But, it's important to remember that it isn't the anger that is the problem. Anger is beneficial because it gives you information about your boundaries and what's appropriate. Long-term, unresolved anger after the situation is over is the true culprit that creates negative consequences for mind, body and spirit.

Making the choice to forgive can be a liberating experience for the "forgiver". We have the choice to forgive or not to forgive and no one can force us to do either. However, it's important to remember that the option to forgive implies that we also had the choice, the option, as to whether or not we took offense in the first place. In non-violent situations, the ability to live life

without taking offense, without giving blame to the offender when hurt, and by offering compassionate understanding, are choices that can offer a life of great peace.

Unfortunately, though, there are situations in our lives that may create pain, anger and hurt that lingers. Sometimes others need to be forgiven, and sometimes we need to forgive ourselves. Forgiveness is not easy, but Dr. Luskin and his Forgiveness Project have come up with a 9 step process to learn how to forgive. Next week I'll share his tool with you step by step so you can benefit from his successful findings.