

## Women Who Attend Religious Services Live Longer

In a new study of nearly 75,000 women, researchers found that women who attended services more than once a week had a 33 percent lower risk of death over a 16 year period. Weekly attendance cut the risk of death by 26 percent!

“Spiritual belief can have a powerful effect on a person’s physical and mental health,” says Dr. Tonja Austin, a family medicine physician on staff at Advocate South Suburban Hospital in Hazel Crest, IL. “As a physician, I see many people turn to prayer when faced with poor health, and it seems to help with anxiety and their ability to cope with their diagnosis.”

The majority of women who participated in the study were Catholic or Protestant. Those who reported frequent church attendance were more likely to be married, less likely to smoke and less likely to suffer from depression. Further research could help determine exactly how these influence each other – are women healthier because they go to church, or are healthier women more likely to attend church?

“Not all people belong to a religious faith, but those who attend church or other religious services regularly probably benefit from a strong sense of community and support from peers. I imagine membership in other social clubs and groups could show similar benefits,” says Dr. Austin. “Social isolation has been tied to a greater risk of heart problems and stroke, so strong social ties and a sense of belonging are vital to good health.”

**Prayer:** Holy God, thank you for blessing our minds, bodies and spirits as we gather together in prayer and fellowship. Amen

## Women, Stress and Heart Health

Pregnancy, the multi-tasking of raising young families with career development, the burden of caring for older parents are just a few examples of the life stages that can bring significant emotional and mental stressors that can contribute cardiovascular risk for women. Since women have longer life expectancies, they often are exposed to the loneliness and depression of living alone. “Combined with hormonal changes, these life stresses can create heart issues,” says Dr. Carissa Buenvenida, a cardiologist with Advocate Heart Institute.

“Eliminating mental stressors is not always an option. Mental and emotional stressors from family, relationships and work are present at all stages in life,” says Dr. Buenvenida. “Finding healthy coping mechanisms to deal with stress helps keeping inflammation down and helps women stay healthy.”

Dr. Buenvenida recommends the following:

**Get active.** Exercise regularly and keep an active lifestyle.

**Cherish quiet time.** Meditate. Do yoga. Take at 10-minute mental break.

**Socialize** with friends, family and people who bring you joy.

**Eat Well.** A well-balanced diet includes controlling salt and sugar content, adding in multigrain, high fiber foods and lowering saturated fats and high cholesterol foods. A clean and healthy diet often leads to us feeling good about ourselves both physically and mentally.

**Hydrate** with water. Avoid sugary and caffeinated beverages. Maintaining adequate fluid balance wards off some of the physical manifestations of stress.

**Sleep.** Make time to sleep and identify and treat any health issues that might be affecting sleep, such as sleep apnea.