

## Marriage Is Good For Your Health

Maggie Gallagher, co-author of the new book *The Case for Marriage*, has a surprising message about one of the big benefits of marriage: it is good for your health.

“Non-marriage can be as hazardous to your health as cigarettes, and more dangerous than heart disease,” according to Gallagher. “On average, having heart disease lowers the average man's life expectancy by just under six years, but being unmarried cuts almost ten years off a man's life.”

The effect is the same for women. “Not being married shortens a woman's life span by more than being married with cancer, or living in poverty,” Gallagher explains. The author and syndicated columnist will be in Chattanooga Nov. 30-Dec. 1 for a series of talks and training sessions about marriage, cohabitation, divorce, and out-of-wedlock childrearing.

Gallagher says that one of the strongest, broadest, deepest findings of social science research is that married people live longer, healthier lives than their never-married or divorced counterparts. She cited a 1990 review of scientific literature that found that “compared to married people, the non-married. . . have higher rates of mortality than the married: about 50% higher among women and 250% higher among men.”

She says that the “mortality advantage” of the married shows up in every country that has good data, including societies with extensive public health insurance and welfare benefits such as the Netherlands, and those developed countries that depend more on kinship networks to provide care, such as Japan. “Marriage seems to actually improve immune system functioning, making the married less liable to even the common cold than the unmarried.”

“Even at quite old ages, wives are less likely than other women to become disabled, and both elderly men and women who are married are much less likely than their unmarried counterparts to enter a nursing home,” Gallagher explains.

Why does marriage have such a strong positive impact on health? In *The Case for Marriage*, Gallagher and co-author Linda Waite provide a detailed and balanced discussion of the benefits of marriage. In fact, the benefits of marriage extend beyond better health to include physical, material and financial, and spiritual advantages, including greater earning power, more satisfying sexual relationships, and more successful children.

“Marriage is a promise,” according to Gallagher and Waite, “a public, legally binding, religiously supported promise that you will stay together and act together as a team for your entire life. Marriage changes two people into one new unit, and it changes the way they see themselves and changes the way other people see them.”

Gallagher describes six dimensions of marriage – a personal bond, a legal contract, a

financial partnership, a family-making bond, a spiritual promise, a sexual union.

“Marriage does not simply certify existing loving relationships, but rather transforms the ways in which couples act toward one another, toward their children, and toward the future.”

“Marriage also changes the way in which other individuals, groups, and institutions think about and act toward the couple. The public, legal side of marriage increases couples’ confidence that their partnerships will last,” Gallagher says.

Gallagher says that the research on the diverse benefits of marriage support both public and private actions to strengthen and support marriage as a primary cultural institution.