

How to reduce the effects of divorce on your health



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RICHARD SHARP AT SHARP FAMILY LAW, BATH DIVORCE SOLICITORS, HELPS SEPARATING AND DIVORCING CLIENTS, WHO WANT TO AVOID PROLONGED CONFLICT, TO REACH SOLUTIONS THAT WORK FOR THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES



Those amongst us who are divorced or widowed could suffer 20% more chronic health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes or cancer than those who are married. This statistic comes from research published in the September 2009 issue of the Journal of Health & Social Behaviour.

The research of 8,652 men and women in their 50s and early 60s in the US, found that the physical stress of marital loss continues long after the emotional wounds have healed. While this does not mean that people should stay married at all costs, it does show that the soon to be and newly divorced need to be especially vigilant about stress management and exercise.

In my practice as a family and divorce solicitor in Bath and Bristol, UK, I witness the enormous stress clients suffer as their broken marriages come to an end. Aside from the many negative emotions surrounding the breakup, like fear and anger that cause stress, there is the alternative accommodation that has to be found, the financial resources that must be stretched, the contact with friends and families that is strained or lost, and the disturbed sleep, poor diet and reduced exercise that creates the unhealthy lifestyle, all adding to stress levels. Divorce is one of the most intense stressors.

To try and reduce that stress, I encourage clients to consider choosing a non-adversarial approach to divorce, like Collaborative Practice or Family Mediation. Not only might that approach help them achieve reasoned settlements but it could be healthier for them, than a positional, adversarial Divorce Court hearing.

Away from the divorce process and court separating and divorcing couples still need also to be good to themselves. That they could do by developing habits that reduce their stress. Cathy Meyer (relationship coach and divorce mediator) suggests ways in which, during the process of divorce, stress can be handled. They include:

- **Making sure you pay attention to your emotional needs** – a talk with a family consultant or therapist can go a long way when you are feeling overwhelmed emotionally.
- **Keeping yourself physically fit** – Nothing helps our emotions bounce back better than physical activity. It helps to relieve tension, anger and anxiety. Join one of the excellent fitness clubs in Bath.
- **Participating in activities that will nurture you emotionally and physically** – Read a good book, sleep well, take a hot bath, develop a new hobby, eat a good diet.
- **Letting go of problems that are beyond your control** – Try and let go of that uncomfortable or painful situation.
- **Giving yourself permission to feel** – If hurt or angry, find someone safe you can vent to and let off steam and get those feelings out. Don't allow them to cause you to seek revenge, play the victim or try and hurt your spouse.
- **Taking time to make decisions** – Take time to think things through and thoroughly weigh all your options.

- **And finally, making time for fun** – participate regularly in activities that bring you pleasure. Do not isolate yourself from others.

As the research above highlights a divorce can be bad for your health. But by taking care of oneself, by focusing on keeping active, healthy and moving forward and not stuck in the past, by choosing a process like collaborative practice that focuses on settlement and reduces conflict, it is possible to minimise the damaging effects of divorce and move on with life.

My practice, at Sharp Family Law, is devoted to helping separating and divorcing couples to find creative solutions to their issues, which, with the help and support of the required professional at an affordable cost, are crafted by them - and not the divorce courts.

For more information on how to help minimise the pain of divorce for your child contact Richard Sharp on 01225 870336 or email him at richard@sharpfamilylaw.com



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