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New study shows that caring for a sick relative can **IMPROVE** your health

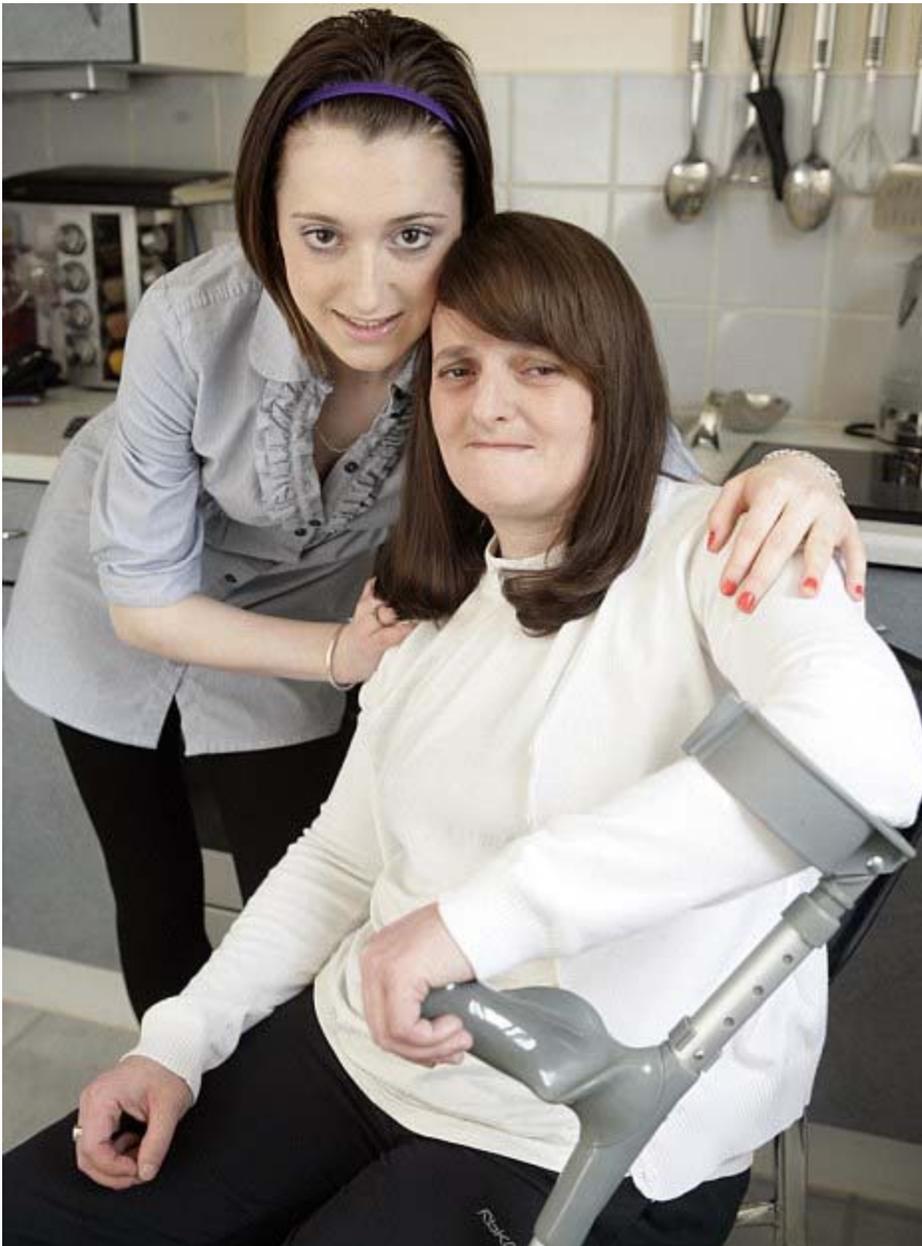
By [Daily Mail Reporter](#)

Last updated at 1:59 AM on 6th July 2010

Being a carer for a sick or disabled relative is acknowledged to be a stressful role that can cause ill-health.

But a study has concluded that helping loved ones can sometimes promote the health of the helpers.

A team of researchers led by psychologist Dr Michael Poulin, of the University of Buffalo, analysed helping behaviour and well-being among 73 spousal carers.



Good health: Being a carer, like Kelly Walker (left) aged 16 who has been caring for her mother, Claire, since she was 10-years-old, can sometimes promote the health of the helper according to a new study

Dr Poulin found that carers experience more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions when they engage in 'active care' like feeding, bathing, toileting and general physical caring for the spouse.

But the study found that passive care - which requires the spouse to simply be nearby in case anything should go wrong - provokes negative emotions in the carer and leads to fewer positive emotions.

Dr Poulin said: 'Our data doesn't tell us exactly what psychological processes are responsible, but we hypothesise that people may be hardwired so that actively attending to the concrete needs and feelings of others reduces our personal anxiety.'

The study involved 73 subjects, aged from 35 to 89 with an average of 71.5, providing full-time home care to an ailing spouse. Participants carried Palm Pilots that beeped randomly to signal them to report how much time they had spent actively helping or being on call since the last beep, the activities they engaged in and their emotional state.

'Certain activities may be beneficial, especially in high-quality relationships.'

The researchers found that age had no moderating effects on the association between caring and well-being.

One variable that did affect outcome was the level of perceived interdependence - the extent to which carers viewed themselves as sharing a mutually beneficial relationship.

In these cases, said Dr Poulin, 'the positive effects of active care were particularly strong'.

Dr Poulin added: 'Overall, we wouldn't say that caring for an ailing loved one is going to be good for you or healthy for you, but certain activities may be beneficial, especially in high-quality relationships.'

Governments come under pressure to provide respite for carers. However, Dr Poulin said: 'As this study demonstrates, it is extremely important that caretakers receive the right kind of relief at the right time - perhaps less time off from active care duties, and more time off from the onerous task of passively monitoring an ailing loved one.'

The study was published in the journal *Psychology and Aging*.

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Surprising conclusion. I worked at a unit for people with organic dementia illness, and most of the carers I met complained of being exhausted, and not having the energy to do a job which is demanding for the young trained staff do for eight hours a day, not for 24 hours a day like the carers did it! At their age it was very hard work but they did it because they loved their partners. It is an altruistic act they do out of love, but most found it very hard to cope because most were older themselves, and they didn't get enough support.

- Marie., Lancs, 05/7/2010 19:16

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I only have experience of looking after a relative with Alzheimer's Disease, in the 80s when hardly anyone knew what this was, as witnessed by the fact that my father's diagnosis was first made on the death certificate. Whether this made me healthier I can't say, but I found it exhausting, draining and very frustrating - not to mention the heartbreak involved in watching helplessly while a sharp, witty, honourable, warmhearted man disappeared into the double incontinence, immobility, inarticulacy and mental vacancy which AD caused.

- Helen, Kent, 05/7/2010 15:38

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It depends on where you're starting from health wise. Necessity meant I had to look after my health or I would have been unable to provide the care needed. I dont think I could have done it 20 years older.

- Keith, Haywards Heath, 05/7/2010 12:32

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Load of rubbish, I ended up with a fractured hip, and a near nervous breakdown after ten years of " care giving " all the help I got was unwanted advice from " caring " relatives who went home after an hours visit.

Roge Mexico

- Roge Wheeler, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, 05/7/2010 12:27

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Amazing how statistics and these studies alter for the propanganda news!

- Tim, UK, 05/7/2010 08:33

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On the contrary, it is very draining and most depressing. Especially if you have to deal with an elderly person who suffers from memory loss.

- Lucia, Germany, 05/7/2010 08:12

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