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## Caring for elderly may offer positives

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*Contrary to the belief that caring a sick person can cause stress and ill-health, a new study has claimed that those who actively help an elderly or ailing relative may be helping themselves feel better.*

A team of researchers at the *University of Buffalo* found that although taking care of sick people is a stressful job, it may promote the well being of caregivers if engaged in 'active care' like feeding, bathing and toileting of their ailing spouses or loved ones.

For their study, the team analysed helping behaviour and well-being among 73 spousal caregivers and found that those engaged in active care experienced more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions.

They also found that passive care -- which requires the spouse to simply be nearby in case anything should go wrong -- provoked negative emotions in the caretakers and led to fewer positive emotions, the *Daily Mail* reported.

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.

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 caregivers viewed themselves as sharing a mutually beneficial relationship.

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

"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," he added.

He also said that 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*. PTI

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