



**UCLA STUDY ON FRIENDSHIP/RELATIONSHIP CONNECTION AS AN ANECDOTE TO STRESS FOR WOMEN ... at last - scientific proof that if you make connections with other women a priority, you'll stay happier and healthy!**

What we are learning is that women respond to stress differently than men and luckily we have our own unique and wonderful way to alleviate it and that is, by connecting with each other. If you are a woman you don't need me to tell you that relationships between women are wonderful and have many special rewards. Every connection we have with each other serves as a reminder of who we really are, as well as a reflection of who we want to be and even who we don't want to be. Women are a calming influence for each other amidst the chaos of life, they feed our souls when our own emotional cups are dry; they fill the intimacy void we sometimes have in our primary relationships and now that's not all. Today we are learning that relationship connection between women can actually alleviate or counteract physical stress - whoopee, sign me up!

Scientists from a landmark UCLA study suggest that going out with the gals can actually alleviate a lot of the physical stress that most of us routinely experience. That's because a woman's body responds to stress by signalling the release of a flood of the hormone oxytocin which has been referred to as the nurturing hormone- as it apparently buffers the typical stress response to fight or flee and motivates women instead to tend to their offspring and gather with their clan (UCLA researchers have dubbed this the *tend & befriend response*) What's more, when a woman actually follows through with this tend and befriend response, studies suggest that more oxytocin is released, counteracting stress further and creating a sense of calm.

The remarkable discovery that women respond differently to stress than men turns 50 years of stress research (predominantly on male subjects) on its head. Laura Cousino Klein, Ph.D. & Assistant Professor of Biobehavioral Health at Pennsylvania State University in State College is one of the study's authors. Dr Klein notes that "until this study was published, scientists generally believed that when people experience stress, they trigger a hormonal cascade that revs the body to either stand and fight or flee as fast as possible." This response is basically the residue of an ancient survival mechanism from thousands of years ago when men's primary *raison d'être* was to hunt, and protect against deadly man eating beasts and, women were left to tend the clan. These researchers now suggest that women have a broader stress response range than just "fight or flight." In fact, says Dr. Klein, it seems that when the hormone oxytocin is released as part of the stress responses in a woman, it buffers her fight or flight response and encourages her to tend children and gather with other women instead. When she actually engages in this tending or befriending, studies suggest that more oxytocin is released, which further counters stress and produces a calming effect. This calming response does not occur in men, says Dr. Klein, because testosterone, which men produce in high levels when they are under stress, seems to reduce the effects of oxytocin. She says estrogen on the other hand seems to enhance it.

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Dr Klein notes that the discovery that women respond to stress differently than men was made almost coincidentally after she had a conversation with another woman scientist in a lab at UCLA. The scientists jokingly observed that when the women who worked in the lab were stressed, they cleaned up the lab, had a coffee and bonded. On the contrary, when the men were stressed, they retreated somewhere on their own. Dr Klein noted to

fellow researcher Shelley Taylor that “nearly 90% of the stress research is on males... and the two of us knew instantly that we were onto something.” Doctors Klein and Taylor subsequently discovered that by not including women in stress research, scientists across the board had overlooked a significant finding: women’s differing response to stress versus men has significant implications for our health.

Study after study supports this research with findings that show social ties reduce our risk of disease by lowering blood pressure, heart rate, and cholesterol. It may take some time for new studies to reveal all the ways that oxytocin specifically encourages women to care for children and connect with other women, but Dr. Klein comments, “ there’s no doubt that friends are helping us live longer. Friends are also helping us live better. “

On that note, Harvard Medical School has a well known Nurses' Health Study the findings of which suggest the more friends women had, the less likely they were to develop physical impairments as they aged and the more likely they were to be leading a joyful life. In fact, the results were so significant, the researchers concluded, that not having close friends or confidants was as detrimental to your health as being overweight or smoking. When the researchers looked at how well the women functioned after the death of a spouse, they found that even in the face of this catastrophic loss/stressor, those women who had a close friend and confidante were more likely to survive the experience without any new physical impairments or permanent loss of vitality. Those without friends were not always so fortunate.

It’s no secret women provide a vital source of nurturing, empathy, love, ideas and strength to each other and now science is showing our connection with each other is a tipping point for better physical health. Now more than ever we need to call upon each other, stick together and support one another.

**If you are looking to connect with more women or want to be a part of something bigger than yourself, we invite you to become a member of our amazing community of talented and big hearted women- *Women with Heart* - Or take a smaller step and join my ecommunity: **Inspire**, offering monthly inspirations, tip and tools delivered right to your inbox. Go to [www.britamclaughlincoaching.com](http://www.britamclaughlincoaching.com) to find out more.**