

# Sex provides health benefits

BY ANNE REBAR  
Columnist

I think one of the most common New Year's resolutions is to become healthier in some way, shape or form, whether it be working out, losing weight, eating better or some combination of the three. However, there is another choice to add to the list of things that can benefit your health: Have sex. Besides intimacy and pleasure, sex also has both short- and long-term health benefits. I've listed seven, which gives you one reason for every day of the week.

## Better Physical Health

With Kirksville temperatures rivaling those of Antarctica, many of us are fighting off those oh-so-sexy runny noses and hacking coughs that come with cold and flu season. Well, here is a much more entertaining solution than stocking up on Emergen-C and tissues: Having sex at least once a week has been found to raise levels of an antibody called immunoglobulin A, or IgA, by about one-third. The antibody boosts the immune system and therefore protects against colds and infections.

Researchers at Wilkes University (Pa.) tested the saliva of 112 college students for levels of IgA. Those who reported having frequent sex, defined as once or more a week, had higher levels of IgA than groups who reported being abstinent or having sex less than once a week.

## Exercise

The Student Recreation Center has become overrun with stu-

dents stampeding to fulfill their New Year's resolutions to work out, and it might seem daunting to fit in regular workouts around girls fighting for their turn on the ellipticals (one of whom will be me, sorry to get in your way, you motivated fitness phenom, you). Not to worry, however, if it's a bad day and you simply don't have the patience to brave the overcrowded gym, because sex can be another great way to exercise.

Thirty minutes of sex can burn 85 calories or more, according to an article by Kathleen Doherty on Web MD. It might not seem like a lot, but that means 42 sessions would burn more than enough calories to lose one pound. Sounds like a fun thing to add on to the weight training sessions and Ab Blaster classes.

## Reduced Stress

Sure, finals might seem like a distant worry now, but pretty soon those papers, projects and presentations will start to pile up and so will our stress levels. Methods to combat stress are diverse and abundant, but few are as fulfilling and beneficial as sex.

Sex can lower blood pressure, which is linked to lower stress levels. In the journal "Biological Psychology," researchers from Scotland published their findings of a study performed on 24 woz-like public speaking and verbal mathematics. Those who reported that they had intercourse responded better to stress than those who engaged in other sexual behaviors or abstained.

## Pain Relief

Whether it be a headache from staring at a textbook for too long, hand cramps from taking notes or soreness after wiping out on the ice inconveniently covering your front steps, life comes with its share of pain. Of course, our trusty bottle of ibuprofen will always come to the rescue, but research shows that sex can relieve pain too.

When you have sex, levels of the hormone oxytocin rise and cause endorphins to be released into your system and pain to decline. In a research study from the "Bulletin of Experimental Biology and Medicine," 48 participants' pain thresholds were measured before and after they inhaled an oxytocin vapor. After inhaling the vapor the patients felt half as much pain as they did before.

## Long-Term Health Benefits

Not only can sex boost your immune system, it also can lower your risks for future health problems. Australian researchers reported in the "British Journal of Urology International" that men who had five or more orgasms a week in their 20s reduced their risk of prostate cancer by one-third. Another study, in the Journal of the American Medical Association, found the same in older men, linking lower prostate cancer risk to those who had 21 or more orgasms a month.

Dr. Mehmet Oz, cardiothoracic surgeon and frequent TV health expert, said on "Good Morning America" that men who have sex



three times a week can reduce their risk for heart attack and stroke by 50 percent.

## Greater Happiness and Self-Esteem

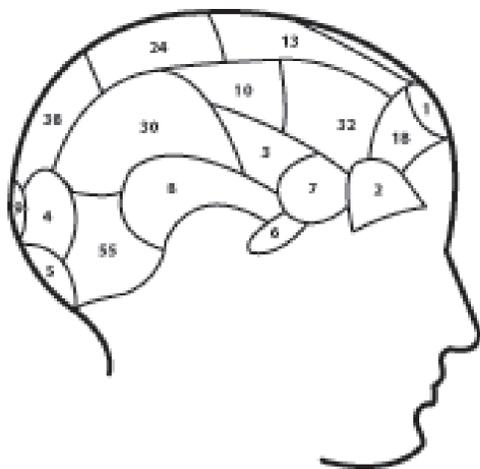
Another thing Dr. Oz mentioned during his segment on "Good Morning America" was that increasing sex from once a month to once a week is the happiness equivalent of an additional \$50,000 in income for the typical American. Since an additional \$50,000 isn't looking too probable in this economy, upping the sex frequency seems like a more viable happiness option.

Higher self-esteem is another factor adding to happiness, which also is impacted positively by sex. A self-esteem boost was one of 237 reasons people want to have sex. This statistic was compiled by University of Texas

researchers. Gina Ogden, a sex and marriage therapist, said one of the reasons people said they have sex is to feel good about themselves, and if the sex is loving, connected and what the person wants, self-esteem is raised.

## Longer Life Expectancy

It is partly to do with all of the other health benefits combined, but frequent sex also has been linked to a longer life expectancy. The hormone DHEA (Dehydroepiandrosterone) increases in response to every orgasm, according to Doherty's Web MD article. The hormone strengthens the immune system, repairs tissue, improves cognition and makes for healthier skin. It can even act as an anti-depressant. All these benefits combined can potentially add on a few years to our lives.



BY ELIZABETH NECKA  
Columnist

The notion of living in a foreign country excites me.

Last summer, I lived abroad in England for eight weeks, and my eyes opened to what exists outside of my familiar little corner of the world. Though I was technically becoming more cultured and knowledgeable, the more I saw, the more ignorant and naive I felt. Never before had I experienced the necessity to think on a broader scale than the one to which I was accustomed.

At Truman, I love to study on the Quad and lie out in the grass, weather permitting. In Cambridge, walking across a college's front lawn is a privilege reserved for only the most distinguished faculty members, so much that breaking this rule can cost you up to 70 pounds, or about \$110. This is only one example of the differences between British and American cultures to which I was forced to adapt.

Even the colloquial language is different. You can imagine the looks I got when, on a rainy day, I referenced my wet "pants" and later learned that "pants" in England means underwear! ("Trousers" was the word I should have been searching for.) Even in a country not too unlike our own, cultural differences abound. A successful stay is contingent upon one's ability to acclimate to the culture and embrace it as your own.

I could give you a hundred and one reasons to study abroad, all based upon my own experience. But psychology researchers recently gave us another one: There's a definite link between living abroad and creativity.

The assertion makes sense: Hemingway lived in Spain when he wrote the first draft of his novel "The Sun Also Rises."

The Truman Experiment:

## Living abroad fosters creativity, adaptation

Although originally from Germany, Handel composed "Messiah" while living in England. Some of Picasso's most famous works were painted while he was abroad. For years we've had a gut feeling that living in a foreign country gets the creative juices flowing, but science has finally caught up with empirical evidence.

In the May 2009 issue of the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, psychologists Maddux and Galinsky completed a series of five experiments regarding creativity and experience living in a foreign country. Some people are naturally more creative than others. Creativity can be linked to the Big Five personality trait of openness to experience and to intrinsic motivations. But even when controlling for these variables, subjects who had lived in a foreign country in the past scored higher on a wide variety of tests to assess their creativeness. They were more likely to develop novel ideas for problem solving, such as devising a way to prevent a candle from dripping wax to the floor with limited resources, and to negotiate a solution to a seemingly unsolvable business interaction, such as taking into consideration the value of non-monetary exchanges.

The same effect was not true in people who had only traveled abroad. This gives credence to the idea that adapting to a new culture is what really sparks creative genius. The researchers argue that living in a foreign country provides a plethora of new experiences to digest, forcing the mind to approach situations with a broad, think-outside-the-box perspective. Living in an unfamiliar society inevitably will force a person to accept and grasp new concepts as they come, making the brain more flexible. This process is called unconscious idea recombination. When traveling, however, people are less likely to experience these cultural nuances because they probably are closely surrounded by fellow travelers. Also, the nature of jumping from place to place while traveling doesn't allow for full immersion into a culture.

There is much psychological support for the strength of priming, or eliciting an affective state in a subject, which subsequently affects his or her performance on some task. Maddux and Galinsky found that not only were people who had lived abroad in the past more creative, but reminding them of their experiences abroad immediately induced

peak levels of originality and imagination. The effect was strongest when asked to remember actively an experience in which the individual had learned to acclimate to his or her new culture, rather than just observing it to be different and unique. When asked to draw an alien, these subjects drew ambiguous and original creatures as compared to their domesticated counterparts, who drew human-like figures with extra or missing limbs or facial features.

True, it might just be that the people who choose to live abroad simply are innately more creative than those who do not live abroad. Nonetheless, the influence of acclimation upon the varying degree of creativity suggests that thinking differently in a foreign place really is beneficial. I can't help but wonder, though, what happens

after you're fully used to the new culture. Does it become so much like your home culture that your levels of creativity fall back to baseline?

28 percent of Truman's graduating class have studied abroad. One of my friends is studying in Spain this semester, and I know she is eager to continue her writing. Another friend is returning from England, and I cannot wait to see what she brings to the creative stages of producing the next play. Should I actually end up going to a graduate school abroad, I can guarantee I'll return with extra innovative problem solving skills. I assure you I'll need them to figure out how to pay back the arm and leg that experience will cost me.

Just think: Our very own Rhodes Scholar is going to spend a year in Oxford - with those brains, that experience and the quirky Truman/Kirksville spirit, who knows what type of alien he'd draw if given the opportunity.

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