

Health Effects of Marital Conflict

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During marital conflict, it's her health that suffers. Men ruminate less, take less responsibility, & don't focus on marriage as a major source of life satisfaction.

Resolving marital conflict is a big part of being married - which is why discussing [premarital questions](#) are key!

Ironically, marital conflict can be healthy for the relationship even as it's unhealthy for wives. Of course this depends on how the arguments are resolved and how well she deals with marital stress. The health effects of marital conflict are cumulative – which means they build up over time and can do long-term damage.

How marital conflict affects health

You feel your blood pressure rise and your heart rate increase when you have an argument with your spouse, don't you? Your breathing accelerates, your voice gets louder, and your emotions are poised and ready to spiral out of control. Marital conflict affects your body.

Stress hormones are released during conflict. Those hormones damage your immune and endocrine systems, which is unhealthy for all aspects of your [physical health](#). The immune system can be lowered for several hours after marital conflict, making you more vulnerable to colds, viruses, and other illnesses. If marital conflict is a constant presence in your life, your overall cardiovascular health may suffer – especially if you're approaching the winter of your life (say, in your 60's or older).

This is all related to wives in particular. Husbands don't suffer the same health consequences during marital conflict.

Why women are more affected by marital conflict

1. Women view emotional relationships as extremely important. Women tend to rate [positive relationships](#) as very high on a life satisfaction scale. Good connections with others offer a sense of well-being and support; marital conflict affects women more than men. Men, on the other hand, experience their relationships as less important to their overall life satisfaction. American men particularly rate independence and personal growth above relationships as sources of fulfillment, which means they're less likely to be affected by marital conflict.

2. Women tend to take more personal responsibility. Because women have an instinct to nurture and take care of others, they feel distress when they're faced with marital conflict. Wives are more tuned in to the [ups and downs](#) of the marriage. They're more emotional, which affects their physical health.

3. Women ruminate more. They think about marital conflict, reviewing who said what in their minds and with their friends. [Simply recalling an argument brings the same physical effects as the actual argument](#), which means the immune system and negative health effects are produced even when marital conflict happened yesterday or last year.

How to lessen the effects of marital conflict

Wives, if you tend to focus on marital conflict, stop! Retrain your brain to think positively. Focus on the things that lighten your mood and lift your heart, not those that bring you down. Not only will your health benefit; your mood, attitude, and interactions with people will take an upward spiral as well. Marital conflict may even lighten.

Husbands, research shows that men who display empathy and kindness during marital conflict can positively affect their wives' health. Do her a favor: show her your best side during a fight. Do that, and you'll be doing yourself an even bigger favor!