
Alternative Medicine

Divorce: The Forgotten Injury

Warning: The surgeon general states that "Divorce greatly increases your risks of cancer, chronic stress, heart problems and a bunch of other side effects you don't want."

"Divorce is deceptive. Legally it is a single event, but psychologically it is a chain. Sometimes a never-ending chain of events, leading to relocations and radically shifting relationships." Wallerstein

More than 30% of U.S. families are headed by single parents. Of which 60% are a result of divorce. Should the number of single parent families continue to grow at its current rate, 13% in 1970 to 31% in 1994, we will have very few two parent families in 60 years.

Does divorce affect adults? Absolutely! The next time a patient shares with you about the rocky marriage they are in, don't forget to provide that person with a shoulder to lean on. Also, don't let that individual leave without bringing up the possible side effects of divorce.

Divorced adults, particularly men, skyrocket in risk for physical and emotional illness and are more prone to risky behaviors that could shorten their lives.

1. Non-smoking, divorced men have almost the same death rate from cancer as married men who smoke 1 pack or more per day.
2. Nearly every type of terminal cancer strikes divorced individuals of either sex at higher rates.
3. Early death from both cardiovascular disease and stroke doubles for divorced men compared to married men.
4. In a 1990 study of 16 developed countries, unmarried men were twice as likely to die at a younger age than married men. For divorced men, risks were sometimes 10 times greater than for a married person the same age.
5. Premature death due to pneumonia for divorced men is more than 7 times that of their married counterparts.
6. Divorced and separated persons experience acute conditions such as infectious diseases, parasitic diseases, respiratory illnesses, digestive illnesses and severe injuries at higher rates than those who are married.
7. Heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis occur in higher rates in the formerly married.

As if the adverse effects of divorce wasn't harsh enough, studies show that the divorced are at risk for serious emotional illness and destructive lifestyles.

1. Divorced men have 9 times the rate of psychiatric outpatient visits compared to married men and 21 times the rate of psychiatric hospital admissions.
2. Divorced women have a 5 times higher rate of psychiatric care than married women.
3. Divorced men are at higher risk for major depression than divorced women among those with no prior history of depression.
4. The divorced of both sexes have more than double the depression rates of those married.
5. Suicide is 4 times higher for divorced white men as it is for their married counterparts. FACT: Divorce now ranks as the #1 factor linked with suicide.

6. Automobile fatalities tripled among the divorced for both sexes.

Divorce Effects Children

Children are often the most hurt. Since they have no control over their parents separation, they must live with its effects. Children are at greater risk, not only for emotional trauma and behavioral problems, but for shorter life spans.

1. Trauma of parental rejection. After divorce most children live with their moms. Nearly half of these have not seen their dad in the past year and 23% haven't seen their dad in the last 5 years. Only 37% have spent more than one day a month with their dad, leading to feelings of parental rejection, depression, low self esteem and acting out.
2. Shorter life spans: A lifetime follow up of 1500 children found that those whose parents divorced while they were still under 21 had shorter life spans than those whose parents had remained married. An average of 10 years shorter for men and 6 years shorter for women.
3. Substance Abuse: Divorce increases the likelihood of both alcohol and drug abuse. Especially in children whose parents divorced while they were teens.
4. Parental divorce is one of the strongest predictors of suicide, now the second leading cause of death among teens.
5. Crime and Delinquency: Children with single, never married moms have the highest crime rates. The children from divorced homes rank a close second. A Wisconsin study found that 87% of delinquents in correctional facilities came from single parent families.
6. Future Divorce: White females are 60% more likely to divorce later themselves and males are 32% more likely if their own parents divorced. Children who experience the death of a parent do not appear to suffer as adverse consequences as those whose families are torn apart by divorce.

If a drug is known to have a major side effect for only 1% of the population, the FDA requires that physicians warn every patient of that side effect prior to prescribing the drug. Research provides that divorce has potentially deadly side effects.

As a chiropractic physician who cares about your patients considering divorce, tell them the facts: Divorce has deadly risks.

As a culture we've tried to dismiss the devastation of divorce, minimizing its effects as "a squall in the sea of life, intense but soon over," but research indicates that for some, especially children, divorce is like an emotional earthquake with tremors felt throughout their life, showing up in increased emotional and physical risk and destructive acting out behaviors.

If your own marriage has fallen apart or your parents divorced when you were a child, deal with that as a physician both emotionally and physically. Your ability to help others work through divorce is contingent upon how well you resolve similar issues for yourself.

If you're currently married, take some time to get away and invest in your relationship and learn to communicate. Don't allow your marriage to drift because of the demands of your practice. Research shows that couples instructed in how to communicate, solve problems and clarify expectations cut divorce rates 5 times compared to control groups of couples that receive no training before marriage. Refer your patients to trained professionals in your community.

For more information please contact the National Institute for Health Care Research at 800-580-NIHR or write: NIHR, 6110 Executive Boulevard, Suite 908, Rockville, Maryland 20852.

Reference: *Physician*, October 1997. "Divorce: The Forgotten Trauma" by Melissa Cox & Michelle Burford.



We welcome your questions and comments: info@chiropractors.org
