

## **Divorce 'health scars permanent'**

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Divorce has a lingering, detrimental impact on health that even remarriage cannot fully repair, a study suggests.

A Chicago study involving 8,652 people aged 51 to 61 found divorced people have 20% more chronic illnesses such as cancer than those who never marry. The figure only drops to 12% for those who remarry, researchers write in the *Journal of Health and Social Behaviour*.

They say we start adulthood with a "health stock" that is kept or eroded depending on our marital experience. Only those who are continuously married can expect the same rate of chronic health problems as the never-wedded, the study suggests.

Although people who remarry after a divorce or being widowed do tend to be happier as a result - being no more depressed than those continuously married and less depressed than those who never married - they gain little in terms of chronic health conditions.

People who remarried had 12% more chronic health conditions than those continuously married, which was slightly less than the 20% for the divorced or widowed who did not remarry.

Researcher Dr Linda Waite, a sociologist at the University of Chicago, said divorce or widowhood undermines health because incomes drop and stress develops over issues such as shared child care.

### Stresses and strains

Whereas marriage tends to bring an immediate health benefit, in that it improves health behaviours for men and financial well-being for women. But remarriage does not heal all. She said: "Some health situations, like depression, seem to respond both quickly and strongly to changes in current conditions.

"In contrast, conditions such as diabetes and heart disease develop slowly over a substantial period and show the impact of past experiences, which is why health is undermined by divorce or widowhood, even when a person remarries."

Anastasia de Waal, of the think tank Civitas, said: "This research highlights the fact that whilst divorce has become much more common, it can take not just a tremendous emotional and financial toll, but also a heavy health one."

Christine Northan, a counsellor for Relate, said: "I'm not surprised by the findings. It's another reason to work hard to make marriages last, unless it is a very destructive relationship.

"It's a good idea if you can use a messy divorce to understand both yourself better and why the relationship did not work. If you do that, you will be in a better place to go into a second successful marriage. But if you are drawn to people who are toxic for you, then you may be better off staying single."

She said a surprising number of people unconsciously look for someone like their first wife or husband and that the chance of a second marriage ending in divorce was two-fold.