



'Godliness is the key to healthiness': Religion boosts mental health, research says

By [Anna Edwards](#)

Religious people have better mental health than non-believers, new research has revealed. Those who follow a faith, regardless of which one, have enhanced well-being, which scientists attribute to their spirituality.

And doctors could take advantage of this relationship by tailoring treatments and rehabilitation programs that accommodate a patient's religious beliefs - especially among mental health sufferers.

Professor Dan Cohen, of the University of Missouri in the United States, said: 'Our prior research shows that the mental health of people recovering from different medical conditions, such as cancer, stroke, spinal cord injury and traumatic brain injury, appears to be related significantly to positive spiritual beliefs and especially congregational support and spiritual interventions.'

He said that those who seek spirituality may help them come to terms with mentally challenging situations, like stress or neuroticism.

He said: 'Spiritual beliefs may be a coping device to help individuals deal emotionally with stress.' The researchers used three surveys to determine if correlations exist among people's mental and physical health, personality factors, and spirituality in Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Catholics and Protestants.

Across all five faiths, results showed a higher level of spirituality was related to better mental health, particularly lower levels of neuroticism and greater extraversion despite how often the patients participated in religious activities.

The researchers believe spirituality may help people's mental health by reducing how self-centred they are and developing their sense of belonging to a larger whole.

Spiritual interventions - such as religious-based counselling, meditation, and forgiveness protocols - could enhance spiritually-based beliefs, practices, and coping strategies in positive ways.

Many different faiths encourage spirituality, even though they use different names for the process - a Christian monk would not say he had attained Nirvana - but they may be referring to similar phenomena. The researchers say the selflessness that comes with spirituality enhances characteristics that are important for adopting a global society based on the virtues of peace and cooperation.

Professor Cohen said: 'In many ways, the results of our study support the idea that spirituality functions as a personality trait.

'With increased spirituality people reduce their sense of self and feel a greater sense of oneness and connectedness with the rest of the universe.'

'What was interesting was that frequency of participation in religious activities or the perceived degree of congregational support was not found to be significant in the relationships between personality, spirituality, religion and health.'

'Health workers may also benefit from learning how to minimise the negative side of a patient's spirituality, which may manifest itself in the tendency to view misfortune as a divine curse.'