

Stay social to improve your health

13 December 2012

Researchers at The University of Queensland have shown that drinking water as part of a social group rather than alone helped reduce the risk of dehydration and falls among the elderly in care homes.

The study explored the health benefits in care homes of 'water clubs' - where residents gathered together regularly to drink water.

Professors from the [UQ School of Psychology](#), Jolanda Jetten, Catherine Haslam and Alex Haslam found that the social nature of the activity was as much a health benefit to the elderly as drinking the water.

The research funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has been published in the journal *Psychology and Health*, and results of related social intervention work published in *The Social Cure*; a book co-authored by the professors.

Professor Catherine Haslam and her team questioned the effectiveness of a water club, after one received widespread publicity in the UK.

"We wondered whether the health claims of a water club in the UK was due to the water or the club?" Professor Haslam said.

The team ran a study in which small groups of residents in a care home met together to discuss the benefits of drinking more water and were encouraged to increase their intake.

"Members of the club reported enhanced wellbeing, and experienced fewer falls and better hydration than those who drank water alone," Professor Haslam said.

The team carried out a wide range of research including surveys and field-based intervention studies investigating the impact of social identity on various outcomes, cognitive health, stress, and wellbeing.

In addition to the water club study, the team looked at group identity effects in patients recovering from stroke, and the value of group nostalgia and other clubs (e.g. Gentlemen's Clubs) among older people in care and with dementia.

"It is clear from this research and a series of other investigations that we have carried out that when people belong to a group, the sense of 'us-ness' that this creates plays a critically important role in processes of health and wellbeing," Professor Haslam said.

"We refer to this as 'the social cure', and it is far more potent than many of the other treatments that are out there.

"Whether we are talking about stress, depression, or recovery from stroke, a supportive group life plays a critical role in a person's clinical path."

Professor Jetten said humans were social animals who had evolved for group life.

"Groups can boost our wellbeing, but at times they can also drag us down and be a social curse," Professor Jetten said.

"Because group life is such an important determinant of health and wellbeing, we need to better understand these processes and dynamics."

This research has resulted in the publication of more than 30 research papers in leading scientific journals.

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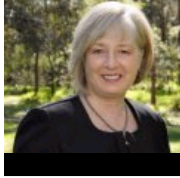


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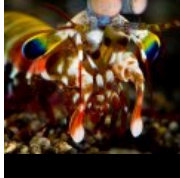
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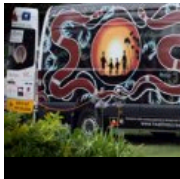
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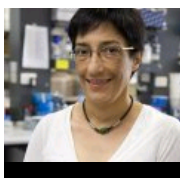


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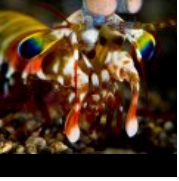


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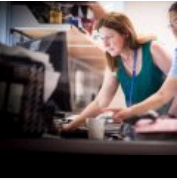
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