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HOLDING HANDS IS A FORGOTTEN TRADITION --Marketwire

But expert warns that this simple act can be more beneficial to health than pills

Holding hands is becoming an activity for the young and in love, leaving many older people lonely and missing out on important physical contact with family members.

These findings have been revealed by Abbeyfield, a registered charity dedicated to enhancing the quality of life for older people and highlight the issue of loneliness for older people.

The poll of 3,000 people shows that more than half of people can't remember the last time they held their grandparents hand and more than a quarter have never done so. However, almost a fifth of respondents, when asked whose hands they would most like to hold, said it would be the hand of a grandparent who has died.

Just one in twenty respondents have held the hand of their grandma in the last month and only one in twenty five made this contact with their granddad. The report reveals a similar gender trend with parents, while only six percent of those surveyed have never held hands with their mother, twice as many have never held hands with their father.

The research also reveals that the older you get, the more you regret that lack of contact. Almost half (48 percent) of respondents over 55, when asked whose hand they would most like to hold, said it would be that of a departed parent.

The majority of respondents (80 percent) associate holding hands with romance but this contact is most popular amongst the young. Of those surveyed aged 17 and under, 64 percent most wanted to hold hands with someone they were attracted to. This figure decreases with age until only 21 percent of those over 55 want to hold hands for romance. This older group are most likely to associate holding hands with dying, 15 percent compared to less than two percent of those surveyed aged 17 and under.

Well known psychologist Honey Lancaster-James has warned that people underestimate the importance of physical contact for the elderly and especially the healing power of holding hands. She said: "Whilst to young people holding hands may be a sign of romance or attraction, for the elderly this simple act of physical contact can have huge health benefits and play an essential role in well-being. Many older individuals feel isolated and lonely and don't have the opportunity to make physical contact with anyone. By holding hands with a friend, relative or someone you care for you're sending a hugely important message that the individual is valued, important and noticed."

She goes on to advise people to reach out and hold someone's hand to help avoid the long term impact of isolation which include depression and loneliness: "For an elderly person, reaching for their hand can have far more benefits than giving them pills.

Because we tend to begin holding hands with our parents when we're small and helpless and later in our romantic relationships, the act of holding hands is associated with feelings of being loved and cared-for. That's why it's so vitally important for the elderly to have their hands held as often as possible, so they can remember and receive that same reassurance".

Paul Allen, chief executive of Abbeyfield said: "Loneliness is a very real issue for the elderly and as our aging population increases, so do the problems.

We encourage more people to hold hands with family members and friends, of all ages.

THE HEALTH BENEFITS OF HOLDING HANDS

We knew it feels good to hold hands. Now we know it's good for you too.

by Meghan Overdeep

When it comes to holding hands, everybody has their preferred technique:

interlocking fingers, cupping palms, interlocking with a thumb rub, or the sweat-friendly pinky-link.

Some people are top hands, others bottoms and some swing both ways.

No matter your style, or how clammy your palms, we all know how good it feels to fit your hand into your loved one's.

But why is it that when we're upset, stressed, or scared we instinctively reach for our partner's hand? Conversely, why is it that we always seem to reach for our partner's hand to comfort them when they're upset?

Well a recent study by University of Virginia psychologist, Dr. James Coan, showed that the answer doesn't lie between our fingers, but in our brains.

Cover: Frank & Mary Verba from Armagh have been holding hands for over 64 years.



