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# Social support improves lifespan in older women

Postmenopausal women who have a strong social network to support them may have a lower risk of death from all causes

**N**EW US research has found that postmenopausal women who have a strong social network to support them may have a lower risk of death from all causes. Carried out by a team of researchers from across the USA, the new study looked at women aged 50 to 79 who were taking part in the Women's Health Initiative, a long-term national health study that looks at strategies for preventing heart disease, breast and colorectal cancer, and osteoporosis in postmenopausal women.

The study included data on 17,351 women with cardiovascular disease (CVD) and 73,421 women without a history of CVD, who were all asked at the start of the study about their perceived level of social support. Participants were then followed for nearly 11 years. The findings, published online in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society (NAMS), showed that



*Having a good social network could have a protective effect against death from cardiovascular disease in postmenopausal women.*

women who were free of CVD at the start of the study and who had a high level of social support also appeared to have a slightly lower risk of all-cause mortality.

The researchers note that this association is a modest one, but still statistically significant. However, no significant association was found for women with a history of CVD. Previous studies have also shown that

social support can help decrease the risk of CVD, with the new study the largest to date to look at the effect of social support on CVD and all-cause mortality in women.

The researchers commented that the results show the benefits of social support for health, possibly through helping to relieve stress, although they add that further research is still needed.

"This study found a small but significant association between perceived social support and mortality in women without prior cardiovascular disease," says Dr JoAnn Pinkerton, NAMS executive director. "If psychological or social support can help prevent heart disease in women, we need further studies to determine what support would be most helpful." **AFP Relaxnews**