

Negative Relationships Accelerate Biological Aging

VOCABULARY WORDS

1. **Biological (adjective)** /ˌbaɪ.əˈlɒdʒ.ɪ.kəl/: Relating to the natural processes of living things.
Example: Your biological age may be different from the years you have lived.
2. **Estimate (verb)** /ˈes.tɪ.mert/: To guess or calculate the cost, size, or value of something.
Example: Researchers use DNA samples to estimate a person's rate of aging.
3. **Chronological (adjective)** /ˌkrɒn.əˈlɒdʒ.ɪ.kəl/: Following the order in which a series of events happened.
Example: Her chronological age is thirty, but her health is like a twenty-year-old.
4. **Accounting for (phrasal verb)** /əˈkaʊntɪŋ fɔːr/: To consider or allow for a specific factor.
Example: Even accounting for smoking habits, the study showed a link to stress.
5. **Obligation (noun)** /ˌɒb.lɪˈɡeɪ.ʃən/: Something that you must do because it is your duty.
Example: Many people feel a moral obligation to care for difficult relatives.



Having someone in your life who constantly hassles you is more than just a minor annoyance; it could actually be accelerating your biological aging. A study recently published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* suggests a significant link between social stress and physical decline. According to the data, each individual who creates frequent problems in your life is associated with a 1.5% increase in the speed of biological aging.

To reach these conclusions, researchers analyzed data from approximately 2,300 participants ranging in age from 18 to 100. The team collected DNA samples to determine the participants' biological ages, which were then compared to their chronological ages. Furthermore, the study utilized surveys where individuals reported the frequency and impact of "hasslers" in their daily lives. Even after accounting for variables such as employment, smoking, and past trauma, the connection between difficult people and faster aging remained clear.

Interestingly, these difficult people were often found in areas of life where participants had limited choices. These "hasslers" included colleagues, roommates, and family members—people to whom the participants felt a strong sense of obligation. While spouses were sometimes identified as sources of stress, they did not show the same strong association with accelerated aging. Experts suggest this is because marital relationships usually provide a balance of support and care that offsets the occasional hassle.

Beyond physical aging, difficult relationships were also linked to broader health concerns, including mental health struggles and higher body weight. While the researchers clarified that their study shows a correlation rather than direct proof of cause, the implications are significant. They suggest that minimizing negative interactions and managing difficult relationships could be a vital step toward aging more healthily and maintaining overall well-being.

DISCUSSION

1. Are you surprised that stress from other people can change your DNA?
2. How do you usually handle a "hassler" in your professional life?
3. Do you agree that we have an "obligation" to stay in touch with difficult family members?
4. In your opinion, is it possible to have a completely stress-free relationship?
5. How does your body physically react when you are around someone difficult?
6. Do you think biological age is a more important measurement than chronological age?
7. What are some healthy ways to reduce the influence of negative people in your life?
8. Why do you think modern society seems to have more "difficult people" than in the past?
9. Does your workplace have policies to deal with people who create problems for others?
10. If you could choose, would you prefer to live a shorter, high-stress life or a longer, quiet one?