

Fed: Love may slow ageing, says scientist

By Janelle Miles, National Medical Correspondent

BRISBANE, March 20 AAP - Watching a sunset with your lover, holding a sleeping baby, playing with your beloved pet dog - they're all timeless moments.

An Australian researcher believes love in all its forms may actually be able to slow the biological clock.

So whether it's between partners, parent and child or even an artist's love of painting - the more love you have in your life, the longer you're likely to live.

"Having love in your life will improve your chances of living a long life," said Mark Cohen, founding professor of complementary medicine at Melbourne's RMIT University.

"When you have love in your life it influences the laws of nature to ... reduce the experience of time.

"So if you're doing an activity that you love to do, whether it's making paper aeroplanes or gardening or looking into the eyes of your lover, you get moments when time seems to stop, or it seems like five minutes but it's really been an hour."

Prof Cohen said research backed up his claim that such moments were healthy for you and may lead to a longer life.

For example, when researchers studied rabbits on high cholesterol diets in the United States, they were perplexed when they found one group lived about 60 per cent longer than the others on the same food.

When they analysed what was happening, they found only one difference between the two groups - the longer-lived rabbits were fed by a laboratory assistant who cuddled and talked to them.

Another study of 1,000 Israeli men with heart conditions, found the relationship with their wives was important to their disease.

"The men who felt that they were loved by their wives had a 50 per cent reduction in their angina and cardiac disease," Prof Cohen said.

He told the International Conference on Healthy Ageing and Longevity in Brisbane love also accounted for the fact that women generally lived longer than men and made up 85 per cent of the world's centenarians.

"Women are working with children who need love, their major work is to love," Prof Cohen said.

"They actually spend more of their waking hours in this state of connection, of union, of love with children, with other people.

"Women are the major carers on the planet and from that perspective, it makes sense that women would live longer because they have more love in their life."

Prof Cohen is trying to test his theory by studying people during meditation - another state where time seems to stand still.

"We're looking at advanced meditators from different traditions and putting them through a whole battery of tests - cardiac function, brain function, immune function, anxiety and hostility levels.

"We want to see how it changes when they're undergoing meditation.

"The preliminary studies suggest that when you're meditating, your metabolic rate goes down.

"That's a similar effect to when you go through caloric restriction- the only thing that's been demonstrated in the lab to prolong life."

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