

Be Sorry, Be Healthy: Apologizing for Your Health

By [Elizabeth Shimer Bowers, HealthDay](#) Reviewed by Farrokh Sohrabi, MD, September 2014

When you say "I'm sorry," it can be good for your relationships and your health — if you mean it. Find out the pros and cons of apologizing.



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KEY TAKEAWAYS

A genuine apology can release anger and result in [lower stress levels](#).

[Apologizing too often](#) or when you don't really mean it can have negative effects, such as reduced confidence and self-esteem.

Saying "I'm sorry" can defuse conflict, smooth over a relationship and even be good for your well-being. But when you don't really mean it, those insincere apologies may not be good for you.

"Depending on why you are saying you're sorry, apologizing can have a positive or negative effect on physical and mental health," says Daniel Watter, PhD, clinical psychologist at the Morris Psychological Group in Parsippany, N.J.

Apologizing and not meaning it can mean you're holding onto negative emotions. And, Watter says, they don't disappear — they come out in the form of depression or anxiety, or as stress-related conditions like heart disease, ulcers, and muscle aches.

Unresolved anger can also raise your risk of having a car accident or developing psychological conditions, like the eating disorder bulimia nervosa. It can also take a toll on the nervous system and get in the way of clear thinking.

When you apologize and are genuinely remorseful, you relieve yourself of these manifestations of holding negative emotions inside. A July 2014 study found that peace-making gestures like saying you're sorry can reduce anger. The research looked at 337 people who had recently been harmed by a relationship partner and found that those who apologized or used another conciliatory gesture experienced lower anger levels.

And when a genuine apology heals a problem in a significant relationship, stress is reduced, hormone levels are back in balance and energy levels return to normal, says Jeanette Raymond, PhD, clinical psychologist and relationship expert in Los Angeles. However, Watter warns that forgiveness can be a slippery slope. "Forgiveness can indeed help you let go of anger, but to forgive someone who has seriously harmed you and demonstrated no remorse may do more harm than good," he says. "In a case like this, the best approach may be to talk it out, which shows courage, rather than to apologize."

Apologizing Isn't Always Positive

In certain situations, apologies can have negative effects.

"When you apologize simply because you're afraid someone will be mad at you, and you aren't truly sorry, it can result in lowered confidence and self-esteem," Watter says. Over-apologizing also can make you seem weak or insecure, and can cause others to lose respect for you. When you say you are sorry because you feel less powerful than someone, you feel pushed into it, or you want to avoid confrontation, you lose the potential health benefits of apologizing.

"I don't think you should ever apologize when you don't feel you have done something wrong," Watter says. He adds that the right reasons for apologizing are an attempt to make amends, to take ownership for your actions and to be honest with yourself. Overall, knowing when and when not to apologize is a life skill, based on having an accurate sense of responsibility. "If you genuinely feel remorseful and would like to express a form of an apology, saying you're sorry can be very beneficial," Watter says.