Aging Lifestyles: Lies aren't always healthy

by Joe_Volz

It turns out that just about everybody lies to the doctor.

A new study from Johns Hopkins School of Medicine confirms how much we lie to doctors. It also tells how little doctors are fooled. They know patients lie routinely.

Typical lies concern how much we eat each day and how often we exercise. Other times we lie about our symptoms to receive an earlier appointment with a doctor.

We did a little research ourselves and discovered, for example, that Horace Miano, overweight by 50 pounds, admits he routinely stretches the truth about how much he eats with doctors. Asked why, he says, "I want them to like me."

Marie Polk always worries when her doctor asks how much she drinks. She has two glasses of wine daily; however, she usually fudges the amount saying she has a drink three or four times a week. She tells us she's afraid the doctor will command her to cut back.

But doctors may be on to such tactics. One doctor tells us that he follows a rule of thumb. When patients admit they drink, he just assumes that they are shading the truth a bit and multiples the number of confessed drinks by three.

How fair is that?

As patients, we are quite indignant at the thought that our various doctors automatically assume the worst. But the evidence is quite persuasive.

The study allots several reasons for why patients lie. Some want to save face so their doctors consider them good patients. Others are embarrassed by their excessive eating or drinking. More than half of patients lie about their medications. They don't want their doctors to know that they can't afford their medicine, so they cut pills in half to make them last longer. They also act as their own physicians and decide to stop taking medicine without talking with their doctors. Other times, they meddle with their dosage because they don't like the side effects.

Naturally, the only ones being hurt are the patients themselves, who can suffer serious consequences when they become their own doctors. Unknowingly, the doctor may prescribe a drug that causes a bad interaction.

A diabetic named Bill had a bad reaction when his kidney doctor prescribed medicine that conflicted with his anti-transplant medicine. Bill hadn't lied but he didn't tell his doctor about all the medications he was taking. He just assumed the doctor knew what he was taking and would prescribe accordingly.

Robert Feldman, a social psychologist from the University of Massachusetts, is a researcher into lying - all lying, not just to doctors. He says that lying is complex and commonplace. His view is that without lies, the white kind, social relationships would be rocky and often broken.

In reality, most people lie for complicated reasons and to keep a relationship on an even keel. While admitting that lying isn't good, he says "it is the way the social world operates."

Without those little white lies our feelings would be hurt and the always-truthful persons might find themselves very unpopular. Yes, the truth can hurt.

If you ask your sister how she likes your new dress, she will say it's pretty and looks good - even while she thinks to herself, "the color's all wrong for you and that square neckline is unflattering."

We lie when honesty "bumps up against other values, caring about another person and their feelings," notes Bella DePaulo, a social psychologist at the University of California in Santa Barbara.

Even if you conclude that kindly lying is a good prescription for dealing with friends, it's not healthy when visiting the doctor.

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