

Doctor Reveals Why Weekly Mass Can Help You Live Longer

Cerith Gardiner/aleteia.org

New reflections from a physician suggest that Sunday Mass may be doing more for body and soul than many realize.

Most Catholics do not drag themselves to Sunday Mass thinking, Excellent, this should lower my mortality risk. They go because it is Sunday, because they were taught to go, because they need the Eucharist, because they are trying to be faithful, or, on some weeks, simply because not going feels worse. The idea that sitting through the readings, standing, kneeling, singing half a hymn, and trying not to think about lunch could also be quietly improving one's health is not usually the first thing that comes to mind. And yet, according to internal medicine physician Dr. José Jorge Maya, regular Mass attendance may be doing precisely that. While his original post is in Spanish, Church Pop has done a wonderful job translating the essentials below:

Drawing on a growing body of observational studies, Dr. Maya recently shared that people who attend religious services at least once a week show, on average, a 21% lower risk of cancer, a 29% lower likelihood of smoking, a 34% lower risk of excessive alcohol use, a 33% lower risk of depression, and, perhaps most strikingly, a 27% lower risk of mortality from any cause. Adolescents, he added, also show lower rates of risky sexual behavior and substance abuse.

The beautiful connection between Mass and living well

Now, before anyone starts treating the parish bulletin as a substitute for medical insurance, Dr. Maya is quick to point out that this is not magic, nor is it some mystical health hack hidden in the missal. The explanation is actually much more human, and perhaps much more beautiful: People who attend Mass regularly tend to belong somewhere.

That may sound simple, but it matters enormously. Week after week, they enter a community where they are known, greeted, prayed for, and woven into something larger than themselves. In an age where loneliness has become one of the great hidden health crises, this kind of steady belonging is no small thing.

Aleteia has previously highlighted similar findings, showing how consistent Mass attendance provides not only sacramental grace, but the stabilizing effect of ritual, familiarity, and shared life. And then there is the matter of stress.

However distracted one may arrive, there is something about an hour spent outside the constant demands of productivity, news, screens, and self-concern that quietly recalibrates the nervous system. The Church, in her quiet wisdom, has been prescribing stillness, reflection, repentance, gratitude, and hope for centuries, long before anyone thought to measure cortisol levels.

Dr. Maya himself put it rather simply: “I have never seen a person go to church or to Mass and leave worse off than when they arrived,” and it is difficult to argue with that!

Even on the Sundays when the homily wanders, the toddler shrieks, and the hymn choices feel determined to test Christian charity, most people still leave with something subtly altered. They are calmer, lighter, less enclosed within themselves. Dr. Maya admits that this has been his own experience too, saying that whenever he goes, he leaves “much calmer, much lighter, and, most importantly, with a message from God for my life.”

A sense of purpose

There is also a final ingredient that modern life often lacks: purpose. Mass interrupts the illusion that our week is made up only of errands, obligations, deadlines, and inboxes. It reminds us, however briefly, that life is directed toward something beyond maintenance. Human beings tend to do better, mentally and physically, when they believe their lives carry meaning, and faith offers that in a way very few other weekly habits can sustain.

None of this means Catholics should now attend Mass purely in pursuit of lower blood pressure and increased longevity. That would be missing the point rather spectacularly. But it is quietly encouraging to remember that the things God asks of us are so rarely arbitrary. Time and again, what nourishes the soul turns out, in ways both visible and hidden, to steady the rest of us too.

So yes, the Eucharist remains infinitely more than a wellness routine, and reducing Sunday Mass to a weekly health hack would miss the point entirely. Still, it is rather comforting to know that when the Church tells us to come every week, she may also, quite inadvertently, be offering one of the healthiest appointments on our calendar.

