



Why do we need the research and why join Stitchlinks?

Some of you have rightly been asking “Why do we need to spend time and money researching the beneficial effects of knitting and cross stitching when as knitters and stitchers we already know how good it makes us feel?”

There are millions of people who have never knitted or stitched and haven't, as yet, discovered the benefits, so we need to get this message across.

When I was a senior physiotherapist working on the community I came across large numbers of people who were isolated and did little more than simply exist behind four walls. The rest of society never sees these people because they rarely, if ever, venture out. Many just sit mulling over their problems day after day.

It's already known and accepted that busy, occupied people feel less pain and depression, so my first thoughts were to try to help these people by giving them the opportunity to become involved in simple knitting and stitching projects. Most of these people would be unable to get to yarn shops and few have computers to buy online, so the idea for Stitchlinks was born. As the only faces many of these people see are those of their doctors and other healthcare professionals, I felt it was important that these professionals knew about the benefits of knitting and stitching. That meant research needed to be done.

To capture the interest of doctors we need to carry out proper clinical trials. Anecdotal evidence doesn't count unless you can collect a very large volume (which is what we are doing via our **'My story' questionnaire** on the home page www.stitchlinks.com. The hundreds of stories we've received so far strongly suggest that knitting and stitching could benefit everyone, not just those who are ill, so the need and scope for our research has grown.

Research in 2005 showed that 1 in 7 people in the UK suffered from **chronic pain** – 60% of those are never treated. It's thought that as many as 1 in 3 people suffer from **depression**. There is an urgent need to find a cheap, easily accessible way in which people can help themselves, both as a self-help tool for these conditions and many others. Also, importantly, as part of **a preventative approach to health**.

I believe that taking preventative measures to minimise the risks and effects of illnesses in the future is much better way of living life than waiting for problems to arise and reacting to a crisis. For example, a daily dose of knitting or stitching can be effective in helping to **reduce stress**. This is important for a balanced life and to bring down levels of stress hormones helping to avoid one of the many stress related medical conditions in the immediate future, or later on in life. Being portable, knitting and stitching can easily be used in the workplace or anywhere else where stress and anxiety levels are high, so can benefit us all.



Stress is a major cause of ill health in the modern world – some reports state that 90% of all illnesses are either caused by, or exacerbated by stress. Large amounts of the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol circulating unchecked in your system can be highly destructive. By consciously managing your stress levels you enable your body to find **a healthy balance** again. More and more people are telling us that knitting and stitching can help to reduce stress quickly, and effectively giving the knitter and stitcher **pleasure and peace of mind**.

Knitters who also **meditate** describe the states of mind experienced during both activities as being similar. The positive effects of daily meditation are numerous and have been documented in research papers, but meditation can be quite difficult to learn and practise. I believe that knitting and stitching opens up the benefits of meditation to most people including children and those with learning disabilities. Our research needs to explore exactly what is happening to your thoughts as you knit or stitch, so we can make best use of, and apply this knowledge. It will also enable us to introduce knitting and stitching into workplaces and industry as stress management and team building tools.

Good **self esteem** is another important aspect of being 'healthy'. It's known that those with high self esteem and who feel 'good about themselves' manage life's normal ups and downs far better than those with low self esteem. They also manage change better and actually see change as a challenge to enjoy. Whether we like it or not, change and problems are part of normal life, so having good self esteem is important for us all.

High self esteem also helps people manage illness. Many years ago I worked in Switzerland and I experienced at first hand how helping people to feel good about themselves actually resulted in them recovering faster from illness and injury. Not only was the environment we worked in luxurious, but in addition to high quality medical treatments patients were offered complementary treatments and access to massage, beauty therapy and hair stylists. The person as a whole was made to feel special as an individual. This made them feel good and encouraged them to want to make the most out of life. As a result they participated in exercise regimes and maintained programmes at home far more readily. High self esteem also helps people manage long term illness more effectively – they stay positive and 'afloat' as apposed to being swamped by their conditions.

When I returned to the UK I was able to put some of these ideas into practise in a project I ran on what was then a long-stay geriatric ward. The effects were wonderful to see – mobility increased, continence improved and nurses took far fewer 'sickies' just by making patients feel better about themselves. The ward was a better place to live and work.



You may wonder what this has to do with knitting and stitching.

Well, they **raise self esteem** by producing an end product that is praised. This can be seen in groups of disruptive teenagers whose behaviour can be changed by learning to knit or stitch. They become dramatically calmer. They start communicating with others and self esteem rises.

"Suddenly instead of constant criticism they get praise."

Many who have long-term illnesses also suffer from low self esteem because they feel worthless in society. **Being able to give something back** by creating beautiful gifts for loved ones or charity, and **a feeling of 'belonging'** raises self esteem and makes people feel worthwhile again. In a world full of daily challenges and pressures to conform, it's easy for self esteem to take a battering even in the healthiest of people, so here again knitting and stitching can benefit everyone.

*"Doing something successful for yourself is highly rewarding!
It makes you feel good."*

Our anecdotal evidence suggests that knitting and stitching are also very effective in helping people to **break addictive habits** such as smoking, alcohol abuse, binge eating and self harm. These, and other side effects of knitting and stitching are **in addition to their highly effective pain and depression management properties**, so we need to get the message across to everyone.

From our research so far it's become obvious that many problems of **rumination** and downward spirals into depression begin in hospital. People tend to sit and dwell on their problems and pain, making these more pronounced. As a result of our research we'd like to see knitting and stitching kits introduced into hospitals and we are already taking steps towards this. We'd also like to introduce knitting and stitching into support groups linked to various hospital departments such as Pain Management Units. Our first group began in May 2007.

Research in other fields has already shown that a process called **Distraction** is the most effective analgesic we know of. **Eye Movement therapy (EMDR)** is already used successfully to treat Post Traumatic Stress and anxiety. **Meditation** has numerous beneficial effects well documented.

And there are more, such as the effect of **colour, touch** and the **creative process**, which could all be happening together while we knit and stitch. Not to mention an **end product of which you can be proud**.



"A number of positive emotions such as anticipation, excitement, pride, and pleasure are awoken and experienced."

That's a very powerful therapy.

With the help of experts in pain management, depression, **dyslexia** and neuroscience, we need to determine what exactly is happening. This will enable us to present our findings to doctors, psychologists, healthcare workers and industry managers as hard data. Anecdotal evidence is just not good enough by itself.

Moving on, we will be able to develop ideas to maximise the therapeutic benefits of knitting and stitching for various conditions combining our medical knowledge with research findings. Who knows, in the future we may even be able to help those on low income by getting their knitting and stitching prescribed in the same way as other 'non medical' treatments can be already. It wasn't so long ago that gym membership on prescription was thought impossible in the UK!

But firstly we need the research.

Knitting and stitching won't take the place of conventional medicine, but they can ease the path of many and can complement other treatments as an effective management tool, perhaps even enabling stitchers to take less medication. After all the only side effects of knitting and stitching is a beautiful end product, which you'll be praised for, and perhaps an addiction to a pastime you'll enjoy!

Why combine this with a friendship network?

**Knitting and stitching + supportive friends + holistic health
= a powerful tool for life**

It's already been shown that **a supportive network of friends helps you to live longer, healthier happier lives**. Add the benefits of knitting and stitching to a global friendship network which works towards holistic health, and potentially you have a powerful tool to help you manage anything life has to throw at you.

Social isolation can have a devastating effect on anyone, but you don't have to be ill to be isolated. Inner city life, moving to a new area, new motherhood, being a carer, even shyness and a busy life can all be isolating.

For those who have already discovered knitting and stitching there are many additional benefits of becoming a member of Stitchlinks. In Stitchlinks we combine emerging research findings with practical health information to help our members get the most out of life. **You don't have to be ill to benefit** – preventative measures are just as important. Taking responsibility for your own health will



include making sure you eat a healthy diet, exercise regularly and practise good posture. Stitchlinks gives information on all these issues.

Combining the benefits of knitting and stitching with our research findings, practical health information and a supportive network of friends means you get the best of all worlds.

Betsan xxx

"I've only been a member of Stitchlinks for two weeks and I feel better in myself already!" Stitchlinks member.

"For the first time in a long time, I found myself looking forward to something."
A sentence used in many stories sent to us

"That first kit was the turning point in my life!" Said by many.

Reminder

To join our research please tell us your 'Story' by clicking on the 'My story' questionnaire on the www.stitchlinks.com home page.