

Sustained Enjoyment of Life May Help You Live Longer

Megan Brooks | December 21, 2016

People who continue to enjoy life as they age may live longer than their peers who do not, according to a new study that found the longer an individual reported enjoying life, the lower their risk for death.

"There have been other studies on positive well-being and survival, but these have been based on measures of well-being taken on a single occasion," Andrew Steptoe, DPhil, DSc, FMedSci, director, Institute of Epidemiology and Health Care, University College London, in the United Kingdom, told *Medscape Medical News*.

"People's assessments of their well-being go up and down," he explained, "so measures taken on a single occasion may be affected by what is currently going on in their lives. We set out to find out whether sustained well-being was important."

"These results add a new dimension to understanding the significance of subjective wellbeing for physical health outcomes by documenting a dose-response association with sustained wellbeing," the authors write in their report, which was [published online](#) December 14 in the *BMJ*.

Inverse Correlation

Dr Steptoe and colleagues assessed enjoyment of life three times at 2-year intervals between 2002 and 2006 and analyzed associations with mortality up to 2013 in 9365 men and women aged 50 years and older (mean age, 63 years) enrolled in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA). Enjoyment of life was assessed using the CASP-19 quality of life instrument.

Altogether, 2264 (24%) participants reported no enjoyment of life on any occasion; 1833 (20%) reported high enjoyment on one occasion; 2063 (22%) reported high enjoyment on two occasions; and 3205 (34%) reported high enjoyment on all three occasions. During follow-up, 1310 participants died.

The number of reports of high enjoyment of life was greater for women and for those who were married or cohabiting, well educated, wealthier, younger, and currently employed.

Mortality was inversely associated with the number of occasions people reported high enjoyment of life, the researchers report. Compared with people who got no enjoyment out of life, the hazard ratio for death from any cause was 0.83 (95% confidence interval [CI], 0.70 - 0.99) for two reports of life enjoyment, and 0.76 (95% CI, 0.64 - 0.89) for three reports, after adjusting for demographic factors, baseline health, mobility impairment, and depressive symptoms.

These associations persisted after deaths within 2 years of the last assessment of life enjoyment were excluded, "arguing against reverse causality or the effect of terminal decline in wellbeing," the authors say.

"We found the more occasions on which people [reported] enjoying their lives, the lower their mortality over the next 6 to 7 years. Those who said they did not enjoy their lives at any time were the most likely to die," Dr Steptoe told *Medscape Medical News*.

"A Good Study"

He noted that it can be hard for men and women to maintain their enjoyment of life as they grow older and are faced with experiences such as loved ones passing away, children leaving home, and increasing illness or disability. "What these findings indicate is that society needs to do more to help maintain the well-being of older people. Having valued things to do and strong social relationships are both critical, and we need to do more to support elders in this regard," Dr Steptoe said.

Commenting on the research for *Medscape Medical News*, Norman Abeles, PhD, professor emeritus of psychology, Michigan State University, in East Lansing, said, "This is a good study because it is longitudinal, has a relatively large number of participants, and adds to our knowledge base because it includes both physical and mental issues and makes adjustments for a large number of issues, like types of illnesses, level of education, marital status, wealth, employment, etc."

Dr Abeles added that as the study authors point out "and as I often tell my students, correlation is not necessarily the same as causation, and assuming causality is indeed speculative. Nevertheless, this study is well done and can serve as a model for further longitudinal efforts in the field of aging and mortality."

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