

Study Shows Happiness Increases With Age

Television, movies and popular music may tell us otherwise, but a new study suggests that older people may be happier than younger ones.

Back in 1965, the rock band The Who wailed the line "I hope I die before I get old," but they may have fallen victim to a commonly mistaken belief that the happiest days of people's lives occur when they're young.

In fact, a new study from researchers at the VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System and the University of Michigan indicates that seniors may actually be happier.

Interestingly, however, stereotypes continue to abound among both young and old whereby people think seniors are unhappy. According to the study, older people "mis-remember" how happy they were as youths, just as youths "mis-predict" how unhappy they will be as they age.

The new research involved more than 540 adults who were either between the ages of 21 and 40, or over age 60. All were asked to rate or predict their own individual happiness at their current age, at age 30 and at age 70, and also to judge how happy most people are at those ages.

The older respondents tended to

be happier than the younger ones at their current ages. And yet, participants of all ages thought that the average 30-year-old would be happier than the average 70-year-old, and that happiness would decline with age.

"Overall, people got it wrong, believing that most people become less happy as they age, when in fact this study and others have shown that people tend to become happier over time," says the study's lead author Heather Lacey. "Not only do younger people believe that older people are less happy, but older people believe they and others must have been happier 'back then.' Neither belief is accurate."

The findings have implications for understanding young people's decisions about habits -- such as smoking or saving money -- that might affect their health or finances later in life. They also may help explain the fear of aging that drives middle-aged people to "midlife crisis" behavior in a vain attempt to slow their own aging.

Stereotypes about aging abound in our society, Lacey says, and affect the way older people are treated as well as the public policies that affect them. That's why research on the beliefs that fuel those one-size-fits-all depictions of older people is

important, she explains.

"People often believe that happiness is a matter of circumstance, that if something good happens, they will experience long-lasting happiness, or if something bad

happens, they will experience long-term misery," says Peter Ubel, the senior author of the new study. "But instead, people's happiness results more from their underlying emotional resources -- resources that

appear to grow with age. People get better at managing life's ups and downs, and the result is that as they age, they become happier -- even though their objective circumstances, such as their health, decline."

Don't Forget About Cardio Workouts

When it comes time to lose weight, many people look to the nearby fitness center to help them shed those extra pounds. When entering a gym for the first time, newcomers are often overwhelmed by the buzz of activity and the clanking of weights coupled with the host of machines they seem to know nothing about.

While an initial foray into the gym can be intimidating, it's important to keep in mind that one of the best ways to lose weight is something you've been doing almost since the day you were born. Since the moment you took your first step, you've been doing cardio, or cardiovascular exercise. More widely referred to as aerobic exercise, cardio has a number of benefits, not the least of which is losing weight.

Cardio strengthens bones. Osteoporosis is a bone disease in which the bones become brittle

and fragile due to tissue loss. This tissue loss can be the result of age or deficiencies in calcium or vitamin D. A workout that includes jogging or even fast walking can reduce the risk of osteoporosis because, as the National Osteoporosis Foundation (NOF) points out, these weight-bearing activities strengthen the skeletal system. NOF also notes that any exercise in which feet or legs are bearing the weight, including dancing and climbing, are effective cardio exercises.

Cardio reduces body fat. Including cardio in your regular exercise routine helps to increase lean body tissue while reducing fat. If the goal of your weight loss is to look better, then including cardio in your regular routine is a great way to achieve this. While this might sound simple, the more calories you burn, the more pounds you'll lose, and cardio has proven to be a great way to burn calories.

Cardio can reduce blood pres-

sure. Many people choose to lose weight not because of a New Year's resolution, but because their doctor (or their body) has told them they need to shed weight to survive. For those with high blood pressure, cardio has proven an effective way to lower blood pressure. A 2002 study at Tulane University found that aerobic, or cardiovascular, exercise lowered blood pressure in all groups of people, whether they had pre-existing conditions or had normal blood pressure.

Cardio can help relieve the pain of arthritis. A cardiovascular program that includes water exercise can be especially valuable to arthritis sufferers. Such exercise can help keep the joints moving while strengthening the muscles around the joints. In addition, cardiovascular exercise increases energy levels, which helps arthritis sufferers better handle some of the daily tasks that have become difficult as a result of the arthritis.



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