

# Binge drinking youths find getting old a drag

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Young men who believe that happiness declines with age are more likely to engage in risky health behaviors such as binge drinking. Their misguided negative view of the aging process may act as a disincentive to behave 'sensibly' and encourage them to make the most of the present in anticipation of 'miserable' old age. These findings by Dr. John Garry and Dr. Maria Lohan from Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, are published online in Springer's *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

Although the harmful effects of [excessive drinking](#), smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise are widely publicized, significant numbers of [young people](#) binge-drink, smoke, and avoid [fruit](#) and vegetables as well as regular exercise. Could it be that young people's risky [health behaviors](#) are linked to their perception of declining [happiness](#) with advancing age?

Garry and Lohan analyzed data from face-to-face interviews with over 1,000 citizens of Northern Ireland aged over 15 years. The participants were asked about their [alcohol consumption](#), their fruit and [vegetable](#) intakes, whether or not they smoked, and how often they took part in vigorous exercise. The respondents were also asked to report how happy they currently felt, as well as to estimate how happy they expected to be at the age of 30 and 70. Those who were over 30 and/or 70 were asked to think back at how happy they were then. The authors also asked them to indicate how happy the average person of their age at age 30 is and how happy at age 70.

Young people wrongly believed that ageing is associated with a decline in happiness. Indeed, young people estimated that happiness declined

with age, whereas in actual fact there was no difference between the self-reported happiness levels of young people and old people.

Just over half the respondents were categorized as binge drinkers - 59 percent of males and 45 percent of females. In particular, young men who were pessimistic about future happiness were more likely to binge-drink.

The authors believe their findings could help inform health campaigns aimed at reducing risky health behaviors in young people. They conclude: "Our findings confirm, in the case of binge drinking by men, that risky health behavior in youth is associated with an underestimation of happiness in old age. It may be worthwhile to emphasize, to young men in particular, the positive impact on their lives of reducing alcohol and inform them about happiness in old age."

More information: Garry J & Lohan M (2009). Mispredicting happiness across the adult lifespan: implications for the risky health behaviour of young people. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, [DOI:10.1007/s10902-009-9174-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-009-9174-1)

Source: Springer

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