

Teen well-being spills over into young adult health

July 19 2011, By Randy Dotinga

A new study finds that teens with a positive sense of well-being are more likely to report being healthy in young adulthood. The research suggests this is not just because teenagers who feel good about themselves are healthy in the first place.

A sense of well-being in [teens](#) appears to have an affect “above and beyond how adolescent health predicts adult health,” said study co-author Emma Adam, an associate professor of education and social policy at Northwestern University.

The study appears online in the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

In recent years, researchers have tried to understand the value of well-being, which Adam said is related to happiness, but also encompasses things like positive self-esteem, optimism about the future and “feeling good about your level of involvement and acceptance” in society.

These factors all work together, she said. “If you have a high positive mood and feel happy, you’re going to be easier and more fun to be around, which will increase your social acceptance and your self-esteem.”

In the new study, the researchers analyzed the results of surveys of tens of thousands of teens and parents from grades 7-12 in the United States. The participants, who first completed surveys from 1994-1995, took surveys again in 2000 and 2001, when the teens had become young

adults.

Compared to those who did not report positive well-being, the odds were higher that those who did report positive well-being as teens would also say they were in good health as adults.

After adjusting their figures so they would not be thrown off by factors like the number of kids who were depressed, the researchers found that teens with positive well-being were more likely to avoid engaging in risky behaviors once they grew up.

The study does not prove that well-being directly causes better health. However, well-being could boost health in a variety of ways, Adam said. People with positive self-esteem, for instance, might be more likely to exercise and protect their health, while positive feelings might boost the immune system, she said.

Research like this matters because it helps pinpoint the positive aspects of adolescent life that affect long-term health, said Sarah Stoddard, a research assistant professor at the University of Michigan School of Public [Health](#).

“For a long time, we were very focused on risk and how would we fix the bad things that go on for kids,” Stoddard said. “With some of the more recent research in and around positive youth development, resilience and empowerment, we’ve flipped that a little bit. We also need to know what aspects of themselves or their lives are positive and how we can promote those positive things.”

More information: Journal of Adolescent Health: Contact Tor Berg at (415) 502-1373 or tor.berg@ucsf.edu or visit www.jahonline.org. Hoyt LT, et al. Positive youth, healthy adults: does positive well-being in adolescence predict better perceived health and fewer risky health

behaviors in young adulthood? *J Adolesc Health* online, 2011.

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