

# Childhood illness linked to less career success

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Child illness is closely linked to your future health and career prospects, a new study suggests. Researchers, funded partly by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the British Heart Foundation (BHF), found that people who had spent long periods in hospital as a child, or had low birth weight, were more likely to find themselves passed over for promotion in later life. By middle-age, these people were also more likely to have a greater risk of developing heart disease.

The researchers looked back over the careers of more than 8,300 civil service workers between 1991 and 2004 as part of the Whitehall II study. The higher career grade the workers reached, the less likely they were to have been hospitalised for four weeks or more as a child. Higher grade workers were also more likely to have been heavier [babies](#).

Low occupational position, in turn, was linked to higher body mass index (BMI), a bigger waistline and potentially damaging levels of cholesterol, insulin and sugar levels in the blood – all leading to increased heart disease risk.

Professor Mika Kivimaki from University College London, who led the research, said: “Our new study shows a link between poor health in infancy and worse future job prospects, but as this study looked at a group of workers in the civil service over a specific period of time it shouldn’t be taken to apply to everyone. Our findings do demonstrate very clearly that your social circumstances can affect your risk of heart disease – underlining real health inequality problems that exist in the UK today.”

One of the MRC's research priorities is improving people's chances of living a long and healthy life. Professor Lyndal Bond, a senior MRC public health researcher, said: "This research group continues to play an important role in reminding policy-makers of the need to break the link between the start people have in life and poorer health in the future. The MRC's many long-term studies have revealed that people from more deprived backgrounds are more likely to be obese and have less access to health services, which in turn leads to increased risk of heart disease. This research provides further evidence that in order to tackle poor health we need to realise that it's never too early to start to address the social determinants of health."

Ellen Mason, Senior Cardiac Nurse at the BHF, said: "There are a lot of reasons why people might be ill as a child, and birth defects such as congenital [heart disease](#) can sadly affect anyone's child. Families shouldn't be worried by these findings – many people who have health problems in infancy go on to become career high-flyers. But this study is a really important reminder that health inequality is embedded in our society from a very early age – even from birth. In a week when NHS cuts are high on the news agenda, this study couldn't be more timely in giving a reminder of the vital importance of tackling health inequality right from the start of life."

Provided by Medical Research Council

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