

Accepting what cannot be changed is key to happiness in old age after loss of independence

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When older adults lose control as they move into residential care, they adapt and accept what cannot be changed in order to stay happy. According to a new study, by Jaclyn Broadbent, Shikkiah de Quadros-Wander and Jane McGillivray from Deakin University in Australia, when it comes to satisfaction in later life the ability to accept what cannot be changed is as important as the feeling of being able to exert control. Their work is published online in Springer's *Journal of Happiness Studies*.

Ageing with satisfaction has been linked to maintaining a sense of control into the later years. Perceived control consists of two components. Primary control relates to the capacity to make changes to the environment to suit your desire or needs - this applies to older adults living independently in the community. Secondary control describes making [cognitive changes](#) within yourself to adapt to the environment - for example when older adults move into residential care. In effect, secondary control buffers losses in primary control by helping us to accept what cannot be changed.

Broadbent, de Quadros-Wander and McGillivray evaluated the differences in levels of [life satisfaction](#) and perceived control between 101 older people living in residential care and another 101 living in the community. They also compared how these two types of control might predict well-being in later life. The authors looked at eight key domains

of satisfaction: standard of living, health, achieving in life, [personal relationships](#), safety, community connectedness, future security, and spirituality and religion.

Their analyses revealed that the unique relationship between primary control and satisfaction was always larger for the elderly living in the community than those in residential care. Equally, the contribution of secondary control to satisfaction was larger in the residential care group than in the community group. Having a strong sense of control is therefore likely to be more important to [older adults](#) living in the community than those living in residential care. In contrast, acceptance is likely to be more important to the well-being of care residents than community dwellers.

The authors conclude: "In order to protect the well-being of older individuals, adaptation involves both a sense of control and the active acceptance of what cannot be changed. Primary and secondary perceived control may predict satisfaction with comparable strength depending on the older person's situation. Acceptance takes more of a prime position in low control situations."

More information: Broadbent J, de Quadros-Wander S, & McGillivray J (2013). Perceived Control's Influence on Well-being in Residential Care vs. Community Dwelling Older Adults. *Journal of Happiness Studies*; [DOI 10.1007/s10902-013-9452-9](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-013-9452-9)

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