

People who enjoy life maintain better physical function as they age

January 20 2014

People who enjoy life maintain better physical function in daily activities and keep up faster walking speeds as they age, compared with people who enjoy life less, according to a new study in *CMAJ* (*Canadian Medical Association Journal*).

A study of 3199 men and women aged 60 years or over living in England looked at the link between positive well-being and physical well-being, following [participants](#) over 8 years. Participants were divided into three age categories: 60–69, 70–79 and 80 years or over. Researchers from University College London (UCL), United Kingdom, assessed participants' enjoyment of life with a four-point scale, rating the following questions: "I enjoy the things that I do," "I enjoy being in the company of others," "On balance, I look back on my life with a sense of happiness" and "I feel full of energy these days." Researchers used personal interviews to determine whether participants had impairments in [daily activities](#) such as getting out of bed, getting dressed, bathing or showering. They gauged walking speed with a gait test.

"The study shows that [older people](#) who are happier and enjoy life more show slower declines in physical function as they age," states Dr. Andrew Steptoe, UCL. "They are less likely to develop impairments in activities of daily living such as dressing or getting in or out of bed, and their walking speed declines at a slower rate than those who enjoy life less."

Participants in the 60–69-year bracket had higher levels of well-being as

did those with higher socioeconomic status and education and those who were married and working. Not surprisingly, people with chronic illnesses such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, stroke and depression had lower levels of enjoyment of life.

People with low well-being were more than three times as likely as their positive counterparts to develop problems in their daily physical activities.

"This is not because the happier people are in better health, or younger, or richer, or have more healthy lifestyles at the outset, since even when we take these factors into account, the relationship persists," Steptoe says. "Our previous work has shown that older people with greater enjoyment of life are more likely to survive over the next 8 years; what this study shows is that they also keep up better physical function."

"Our results provide further evidence that enjoyment of [life](#) is relevant to the future disability and mobility of older people," Steptoe and coauthors conclude. "Efforts to enhance well-being at older ages may have benefits to society and health care systems."

More information: Paper:

www.cmaj.ca/lookup/doi/10.1503/cmaj.131155

Provided by Canadian Medical Association Journal

Citation: People who enjoy life maintain better physical function as they age (2014, January 20) retrieved 6 May 2024 from

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