

Boosting self-esteem prevents health problems for seniors

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The importance of boosting self-esteem is normally associated with the trials and tribulations of adolescence. But new research from Concordia University shows that it's even more important for older adults to maintain and improve upon those confidence levels as they enter their twilight years. That's because boosting self-esteem can help buffer potential health threats typically associated with the transition into older adulthood.

A new study published in the journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, led by psychology researchers Sarah Liu and Carsten Wrosch from Concordia University's Centre for Research in Human Development found that boosting [self-esteem](#) can buffer potential health threats in seniors.

While previous research focused on self-esteem levels, Liu and Wrosch examined changes to self-esteem within each individual over time. They found that if an individual's self-esteem decreased, the [stress hormone cortisol](#) increased—and vice versa. This association was particularly strong for participants who already had a history of stress or depression.

The research team met with 147 adults aged 60 and over to measure their [cortisol levels](#), self-esteem, stress, and symptoms of depression every 24 months over four years. Self-esteem was measured through standard questions, such as whether the participant felt worthless. The study also took into account personal and health factors like economic status, whether the participant was married or single, and mortality risk.

Results showed that maintaining or even improving self-esteem could help prevent [health problems](#). "Because self-esteem is associated with psychological wellbeing and physical health, raising self-esteem would be an ideal way to help prevent health problems later in life," says Liu.

While it's easier said than done to tell an older adult to "go out and make more friends, or simply enhance their feelings of self-worth," says Liu from a practical standpoint, such steps improve self-esteem.

"Improving self-esteem provides real health benefits in seniors," says Liu. "The ultimate solution may be to prevent self esteem from declining."

While this study looked at cortisol levels, Liu says future research could examine immune function to further illuminate how increases in self-esteem can contribute to patterns of healthy aging.

Provided by Concordia University

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