

Even small stressors may be harmful to men's health, research shows

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Older men who lead high-stress lives, either from chronic everyday hassles or because of a series of significant life events, are likely to die earlier than the average for their peers, new research from Oregon State University shows.

"We're looking at long-term patterns of stress – if your [stress level](#) is

chronically high, it could impact your mortality, or if you have a series of [stressful life events](#), that could affect your mortality," said Carolyn Aldwin, director of the Center for Healthy Aging Research in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at OSU.

Her study looked at two types of stress: the everyday hassles of such things as commuting, job stress or arguments with family and friends; and significant life events, such as job loss or the death of a spouse.

Both types appear to be harmful to [men's health](#), but each type of stress appears to have an independent effect on mortality. Someone experiencing several stressful life events does not necessarily have high levels of stress from everyday hassles, Aldwin said. That is determined more by how a person reacts to the stress.

"It's not the number of hassles that does you in, it's the perception of them being a big deal that causes problems," Aldwin said. "Taking things in stride may protect you."

Aldwin's latest research on long-term patterns of stress in men was published recently in the journal "*Experimental Gerontology*." Co-authors of the study were Yu-Jin Jeong of Chonbuk National University in Korea; Heidi Igarashi and Soyoung Choun of OSU; and Avron Spiro III of Boston University. The research was funded by the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The researchers used data from the Veterans Affairs Normative Aging Study. They studied stressful life events and everyday hassles for 1,293 men between 1989 and 2005 then followed the men until 2010. About 43 percent of the men had died by the end of the study period.

About a third of the men who reported having few stressful life events had died, while closer to half of the men reporting moderate or high

numbers of stressful events had died by the end of the study.

Men who reported few everyday hassles had the lowest mortality rate, at 28.7 percent. Just under half of the men reporting a mid-range number of hassles had died by the end of the study, while 64.3 percent of the men reporting a high number of hassles had died.

Stressful [life events](#) are hard to avoid, but men may live longer if they're able to control their attitudes about everyday hassles, such as long lines at the store or traffic jams on the drive home, Aldwin said.

"Don't make mountains out of molehills," she said. "Coping skills are very important."

The study gives a snapshot of the effects of stress on men's lives and the findings are not a long-term predictor of health, she said. Stress and other health issues can develop over a long period of time.

Aldwin said future research will look more closely at the different stressors' effects on health to see if the two types of stress have similar or different impacts on the body's physiology. Understanding how stress affects health.

Provided by Oregon State University

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