

A sense of purpose may help your heart

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Study finds physical rewards in meaningful activity.

(HealthDay)—Living your life with a strong sense of purpose may lower your risk for early death, heart attack or stroke, new research suggests.

The finding is based on a broad review of past research involving more than 137,000 people in all.

"Psychosocial conditions such as depression, anxiety, chronic stress and social isolation have strong associations with heart disease and mortality," said study lead author Dr. Randy Cohen, a cardiologist at Mount Sinai St. Luke's-Roosevelt Hospitals in New York City.

Recently, however, attention has focused on the impact that positive emotions have on overall health and well-being, he said.

"Purpose in life is considered a basic psychological need, and has been defined as a sense of meaning and direction in one's life, which gives the

feeling that life is worth living," he explained.

The research team reviewed 10 published studies. The average follow-up was 8.5 years.

Compared to people with a low sense of purpose, those possessing a strong sense of purpose had a 23 percent reduced risk of death from any cause, the researchers found.

A strong purpose in life was also linked to a 19 percent reduced risk for cardiovascular-related events such as [heart attack](#) or stroke, coronary artery stent placement or bypass surgery, the study said.

Cohen and his colleagues were scheduled to discuss their findings Friday in Baltimore at a meeting of the American Heart Association. Research presented at meetings is considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed medical journal.

Although the review revealed a "significant" link between having a high sense of purpose and a lower risk for death due to any reason, it did not establish a direct cause-and-effect relationship.

Still, Cohen said the findings suggest that "psychological health and well-being are important components of physical health.

"Individuals should make time for self-reflection and define, for themselves, what goals and aspirations will promote a sense of life satisfaction and vitality," he added.

Kit Yarrow, a professor emeritus of consumer psychology at Golden Gate University in San Francisco, supported Cohen's conclusions.

"These kinds of studies are really just a validation of a relationship that

makes a lot of sense," Yarrow said.

This kind of research is particularly relevant because it stresses the importance of having a purpose, as opposed to having fun, Yarrow said.

"The downside of working too hard and the importance of having fun is something that's been drilled into the younger generation today. But fun isn't actually that rewarding," she said.

"Fun is fleeting, and it doesn't offer you a context for your [life](#)," Yarrow added. "It doesn't give you connections with other people that are super-meaningful."

Having a purpose often involves contributing to society or to individuals, Yarrow pointed out.

"Having purpose is invaluable," she said. "And when you have it, it will offer the kind of mental clarity that will translate into physical clarity and better health."

More information: For more about mental health and heart disease, see the [U.S. National Institute of Mental Health](#).

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