

The great escape: Why awareness of mortality can be bad for health

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People with low self-esteem use a variety of escape mechanisms to avoid thinking about their own mortality, new research reveals.

Researchers led by Dr Arnaud Wisman, of the University of Kent's School of Psychology, found evidence in five studies that people with low self-esteem respond to reminders of their own mortality by directing their focus away from the 'self'.

The research found an empirical and causal link between people with low self-esteem having unconscious concerns about their own mortality and then employing a variety of ways to escape from self-awareness. The study demonstrated this link both inside and outside the laboratory.

This escape from self-awareness took the form of avoiding writing about the self, heightened [alcohol consumption](#) and less activation of self-related thoughts, the researchers discovered.

In addition to drinking more alcohol in response to a mortality reminder, people with [low self-esteem](#) may be more likely to choose to engage in any number of [health risk behaviors](#) such as drug use, [binge eating](#), smoking, and cutting that are conducive to escaping self-awareness. This would enable them to, at least in the short term, avoid negative self-awareness.

It is expected that these the findings will have implications for future public health policy decision-making.

More information: The paper, entitled The great escape: The role of self-esteem and self-related cognition in terror management, is published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. See:

www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../ii/S0022103115000578

Provided by University of Kent

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