

For many with MS, well-being increases with age

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(HealthDay)—Living with a potentially disabling condition like multiple

sclerosis (MS) can be difficult, but new research suggests patients get better at dealing with it over time.

"There's an aging paradox in healthy adults. We expect people who are older to be more depressed and anxious because of aging processes [such as physical aches and pain and losing friends and family], but instead, people who are older tend to be less depressed and have better well-being in comparison to younger adults," said study author Yael Goverover.

"We saw this same pattern in people with MS. Older patients with MS reported less depression and better quality of life compared to younger people," Goverover explained. She's an associate professor of occupational therapy at New York University, and a visiting scientist at the Kessler Foundation in East Hanover, N.J.

Multiple sclerosis is an unpredictable disease of the central nervous system. It disrupts communication between nerve cells in the brain, and it also interferes with the ability of the brain to communicate with the body.

The disease is typically diagnosed in people between the ages of 20 and 50, according to the National Multiple Sclerosis Society. Symptoms of MS include fatigue, pain, numbness, tingling, dizziness, vision problems and walking difficulties. There is no cure for MS, but medications and therapies help manage it.

The study included 57 people with MS. The researchers divided them into three different age ranges: 35 to 44, 45 to 54 and 55 to 65. The participants completed several tests to measure their quality of life and depression levels.

The researchers controlled the data for a number of factors, such as the

length of time with the disease and the severity of the disease.

They found significant differences in depression and quality of life between each group. The oldest people had the lowest levels of depression and higher levels of well-being.

Goverover said the researchers were somewhat surprised by the findings, but suspect older people may have developed more resources to deal with the illness.

"The good news is that with age comes wisdom, and people learn to accept the changes that come with MS," she said.

Goverover said the study wasn't designed to tease out the specific reasons why older people seem to be more content. But she suspects that older people with MS have more experience with the disease.

"The more you go through, you learn to expect changes, and know the next phase will come and you'll readjust. As you get older, you know more about what to expect with MS," she said.

Goverover said younger people with MS shouldn't hesitate to get help if they're feeling depressed. "Don't wait to get help. There are pharmacological treatments and behavioral and cognitive therapies that can help," she noted.

Judy Malinowski, a psychologist with Ascension Eastwood Behavioral Health in Novi, Mich., said she wasn't surprised by the findings.

"I think with maturity and age, we have the opportunity for greater acceptance. For people with MS, they've dealt with symptoms and learned different coping skills and you've learned to live with MS. If you're younger, you're not quite sure yet," said Malinowski, who wasn't

involved with the study.

She added that as people age, they learn the importance of taking care of themselves.

"You realize along the way that self-care and the ability to manage stress can have an impact on your health. How we feel and how we look at life affects how we function physically. And, as you get older with MS, because you have an increased challenge, you have to learn to take better care of yourself," she said.

Malinowski said that as you get older, it often becomes easier to look at life's challenges as opportunities for growth.

"You can let a challenge control you, or you can try to rise above it and see it as an opportunity. When you look at something differently, it changes," she noted.

The study was published recently in the journal *Rehabilitation Psychology*.

More information: Yael Goverover, Ph.D., visiting scientist, Kessler Foundation, East Hanover, N.J., and associate professor of occupational therapy, New York University, New York City; Judy Malinowski, M.A., psychologist, Ascension Eastwood Behavioral Health, Novi, Mich.; August 2018, *Rehabilitation Psychology*

Learn more about emotional well-being when living with multiple sclerosis from the [National Multiple Sclerosis Society](#).

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