

Millennials have worse health than Generation X, and they'll pay more for care, too, report says

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Millennials are on track to be in poorer health than the previous generation, and Ohio medical experts warn that the trend could translate into higher health care costs and shorter lives.

Millennials' worse health is largely a result of an increase in behavioral issues such as depression and addiction, but also of hypertension and high cholesterol, among other factors, according to a report released by insurer Blue Cross Blue Shield.

The opioid epidemic also might be a factor, according to the November report.

The report raises a big red flag because "typically speaking, it's the [young people](#) you expect to be healthier," said Dr. Randell Wexler, a family medicine physician at Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center.

"It's a big deal physically, financially and emotionally and a strain to a system that's not ready to handle that many people at such a young age," Wexler said.

Millennials are people who were born between 1981 and 1996, and Generation Xers were born between 1965 and 1980.

If the trend continues, the millennial mortality rate could increase by more than 40% compared with that of Generation X at the same age, according to the study.

The [millennial](#) mortality rate for age 35 is on track to be just below 0.25% for men and about 0.12% for women. That's up from a Generation X mortality rate at age 35 that peaked at just under 0.20% for men and about 0.10% for women, the report shows.

Getting more active is the best way for young people to attack both the physical and mental health concerns raised by the report, Wexler said.

"Exercise is the most important thing," he said. "It's the one thing they

can do that cuts across everything, and people need to know that even walking (more) counts."

Poor health is something of a "vicious cycle," said Tom Campanella, an associate professor of health economics at Baldwin Wallace University in the Cleveland suburb of Berea. A depressed person is not only more likely to suffer from substance abuse but also less likely to exercise, he said.

Reinforcing that, Campanella said, is the advent of social media and personal devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops. Together, they allow people to entertain themselves without much physical activity and can isolate people from others, leading to more depression, he said.

"I think there's some direct tie-ins to a number of different factors," Campanella said. "But if you're glued to the cellphone, the social media or the video game, you're not out there doing sports or exercising."

The Blue Cross Blue Shield report, Campanella said, should serve as a [warning sign](#) to millennials. That means they need to go to the doctor for regular checkups instead of just when they get sick, both Wexler and Campanella said.

The survey also says that almost one-third of millennials do not have a primary care physician, which probably keeps many from getting preventive care.

If millennials' health doesn't improve, it could have serious economic implications, the study suggests. If they are home sick more often or unable to hold a job because they're ill, they will contribute less to the economy and bring home less pay.

Millennials could see their income decline by \$4,500 per year compared

with Generation X at the same age because of health problems, according to the report.

Millennials also could end up paying 33% more to cover the cost of their health issues if trends continue, according to the study.

Those numbers alone should spur people to be more proactive on [health](#) care, Campanella said,

"It's a message to society that we need to be directing resources to initiatives that are focused on keeping people healthy," he said. "It's going to be a foregone conclusion if we just sit back and watch."

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