

# Marriage strongly associated with optimal health and well-being in men as they age

August 21 2024

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A new study that followed over 7,000 Canadians, middle-aged and older, for approximately three years found that married men or men who became married during the study period were twice as likely to age

optimally compared to their never-married male peers.

Among women, those who had never married were twice as likely to age optimally compared to married respondents who became widowed or divorced during the study period. Married women did not differ significantly from never-married women with respect to optimal aging.

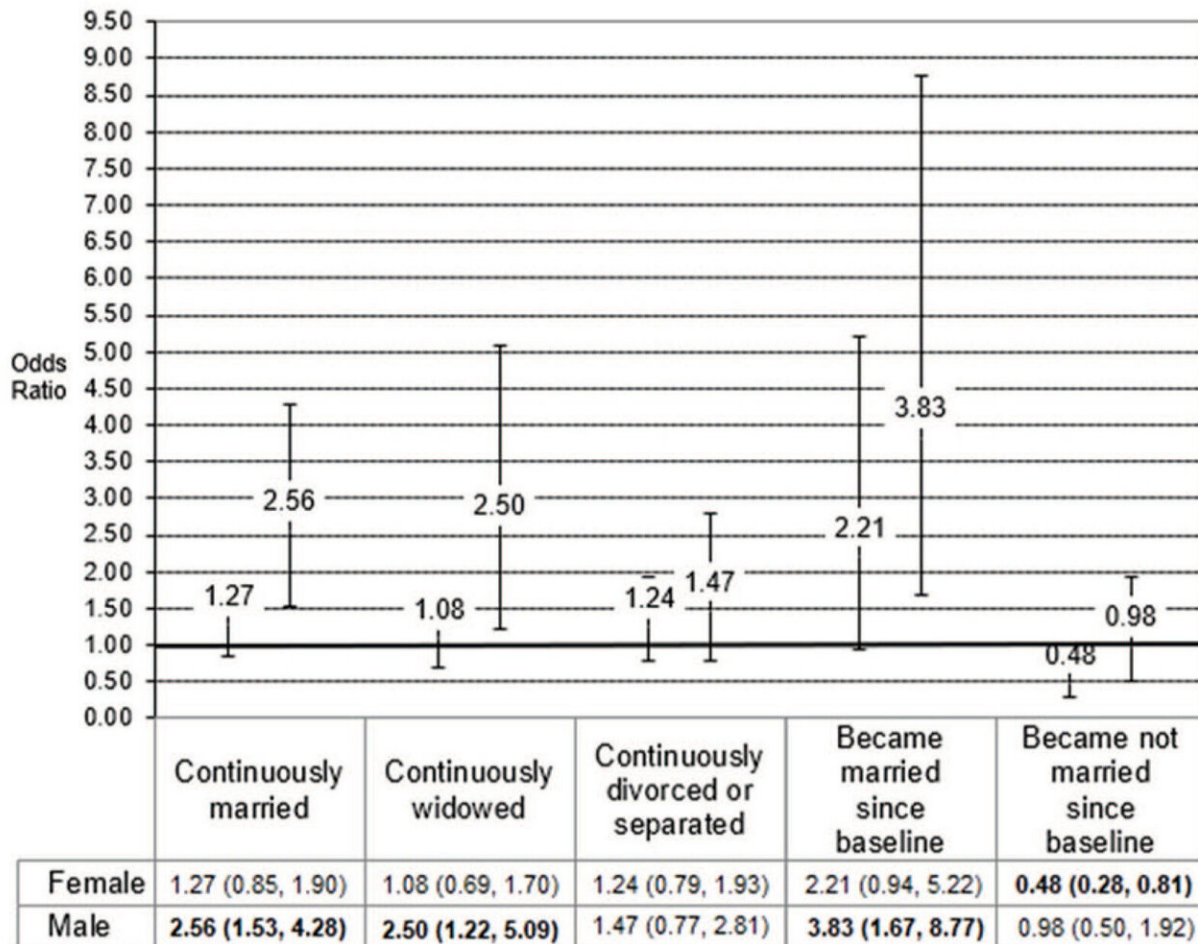
"Little is known about the relationship between marital trajectories in old age and successful aging. Our goal was to see whether different marital trajectories were associated with physical health and well-being, and whether these relationships varied for men and women," says first author Mabel Ho, a recent doctoral graduate at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work (FIFSW) and the Institute of Life Course and Aging.

The researchers defined optimal aging as freedom from any serious physical, cognitive, mental, or emotional conditions that prevent [daily activities](#), as well as high levels of self-reported happiness, good physical health, and [mental health](#). The sample for the current study was restricted to the 40% of participants who were deemed to be successfully aging at the start of the study.

"Previous studies have shown that marriage is associated with better health outcomes for both men and women, while men who were never married generally had the poorest health outcomes," says David Burnes, Professor and Canada Research Chair at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "It may be that married people encourage each other to adopt or maintain positive health behaviors such as quitting smoking or exercising regularly."

Older adults who were not socially isolated were more likely to maintain optimal health in old age. Those who had regular contact with relatives, friends and neighbors were more likely to age optimally compared to

older adults who were socially isolated.



Reference category = Never married in either wave  
 Source: Baseline and follow-up 1 data of Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging

Sex-specific adjusted odds ratios and 95% confidence intervals of successful aging among respondents who experienced various trajectories of marital status vs respondents who were never married (Male, n = 3926; Female, n = 3715). Credit: *International Social Work* (2024). DOI: 10.1177/00208728241267791, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00208728241267791>

"Being socially connected with others is important, especially in later

life. Having regular contact with relatives, friends and neighbors can help older adults feel connected, reduce their sense of loneliness, and improve their overall well-being," says Eleanor Pullenayegum, a Senior Scientist at The Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) and professor at the University of Toronto.

The study also found that lifestyle factors such as maintaining a [healthy body weight](#), being physically active, not having insomnia and not smoking were important in maintaining optimal health in later life.

"It is so important to maintain a [healthy lifestyle](#), no matter how old we are. For example, it is never too late to quit smoking," says senior author Esme Fuller-Thomson, Director of the Institute for Life Course & Aging and Professor at the University of Toronto's Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work. "In our study those who were former smokers were much more likely to be aging optimally than those who continued to smoke."

"Our study underlines the importance of understanding [sex-specific differences](#) in aging so that we can better support older men and women to continue to thrive in later life," concluded Ho. "Our findings can inform the development of programs and services to engage and support older adults, particularly those who were never married or experienced widowhood, separation, and divorce in later life."

This study titled "[The association between trajectories of marital status and successful aging varies by sex: Findings from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging \(CLSA\)](#)" was published online this week in the journal *International Social Work*.

It uses longitudinal data from the baseline wave (2011–2015) and the first follow-up wave (2015–2018) of data from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA) to examine factors associated with successful aging. The CLSA included 7,641 respondents aged 60 years

or older at wave 2 and in excellent health during the baseline wave of data collection.

**More information:** The association between trajectories of marital status and successful aging varies by sex: Findings from the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging (CLSA), *International Social Work* (2024). DOI: [10.1177/00208728241267791](https://doi.org/10.1177/00208728241267791), [journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00208728241267791](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00208728241267791)

Provided by University of Toronto

Citation: Marriage strongly associated with optimal health and well-being in men as they age (2024, August 21) retrieved 21 August 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-08-marriage-strongly-optimal-health-men.html>

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