Optimism may reduce risk of dying prematurely among women
7 December 2016

The study also found that healthy behaviors only partially explain the link between optimism and reduced mortality risk. One other possibility is that higher optimism directly impacts our biological systems, Kim said.

The study analyzed data from 2004-2012 from 70,000 women enrolled in the Nurses' Health Study, a long-running study tracking women's health via surveys every two years. They looked at participants' levels of optimism and other factors that might play a role in how optimism may affect mortality risk, such as race, high blood pressure, diet, and physical activity.

The most optimistic women (the top quartile) had a nearly 30% lower risk of dying from any of the diseases analyzed in the study compared with the least optimistic women (the bottom quartile), the study found. The most optimistic women had a 16% lower risk of dying from cancer; 38% lower risk of dying from heart disease; 39% lower risk of dying from stroke; 38% lower risk of dying from respiratory disease; and 52% lower risk of dying from infection.

While other studies have linked optimism with reduced risk of early death from cardiovascular problems, this was the first to find a link between optimism and reduced risk from other major causes.

"Previous studies have shown that optimism can be altered with relatively uncomplicated and low-cost interventions—even something as simple as having people write down and think about the best possible outcomes for various areas of their lives, such as careers or friendships," said postdoctoral research fellow Kaitlin Hagan, co-lead author of the study. "Encouraging use of these interventions could be an innovative way to enhance health in the future."

More information: "Optimism and Cause-Specific
Mortality: A Prospective Cohort Study," Eric S. Kim, Kaitlin A. Hagan, Francine Grodstein; Dawn L. DeMeo, Immaculata De Vivo, Laura D. Kubzansky, American Journal of Epidemiology, online December 7, 2016, DOI: 10.1093/aje/kww182

Provided by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.