

Age affects how we predict and respond to stress at home

19 April 2018, by Matt Shipman



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A recent study finds that older adults are better than younger adults at anticipating stressful events at home - but older adults are not as good at using those predictions to reduce the adverse impacts of the stress.

"Home [stress](#), in this context, might be related to chores, home maintenance and having too much to do around the house," says Shevaun Neupert, an associate professor of psychology at North Carolina State University and lead author of a paper on the work. "Older [adults](#) - over the age of 60 - predicted and experienced more [stressful events](#) at home than younger adults. However, when younger adults - under the age of 36 - did predict these stressful events, those stressors had less of an adverse impact on their moods.

"This suggests that younger adults are doing a better job of using some anticipatory coping skills to blunt the impact of home stressors - though there was one clear exception."

The study involved having 107 adults aged 18-36 and 116 adults aged 60-90 complete a survey on

eight consecutive days related to stressors, mood, the extent to which they predicted experiencing stress the following day, and how - if at all - they were using anticipatory coping mechanisms to prepare for those stressors.

"We found that accurately predicting home stressors had very little impact on the mood of older adults," Neupert says. "But it had a dramatically positive impact on younger adults. The one exception was for younger adults who got stuck in so-called stagnant deliberation."

Stagnant deliberation is when people try to solve a problem but feel like they're not making progress.

"It's kind of like running in place mentally, and we found that [younger adults](#) who engaged in stagnant deliberation had a steep increase in negative affect when the home stressor happened," Neupert says.

In other words, under these circumstances, the anticipatory coping actually backfires for young adults, making things worse. Meanwhile, stagnant deliberation didn't appear to affect [older adults](#) one way or the other.

"This really highlights the distinctions between [age groups](#) when it comes to predicting and responding to stress in particular contexts," Neupert says. "For example, this study also looked at stress in the workplace, and we found little difference across age groups. But in the [home](#), the differences were dramatic."

The paper, "Daily Stressor Forecasts and Anticipatory Coping: Age Differences in Dynamic, Domain-Specific Processes," is published in *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*.

More information: Shevaun D Neupert et al, Daily Stressor Forecasts and Anticipatory Coping: Age Differences in Dynamic, Domain-Specific Processes, *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B*

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