

Optimism linked to a longer life

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Older individuals who think positively appear to have a greater chance of living longer and being more fulfilled than pessimistic people, a group of Dutch investigators report.

"Many studies have consistently linked depression to an excess risk of cardiovascular and all-cause mortality, whereas relationships with positive aspects of personality have received less attention," states Dr. Erik Giltay (Psychiatric Center GGZ Delfland.).

To investigate the worth of a positive outlook, the team looked at whether participants who are optimistic live a longer and healthier life than people who are pessimistic.

Information was gathered for 941 men and women aged between 65 and 85 years who completed a 30-item survey on health issues, self-respect, self-esteem, optimism, and quality of relationships.

The participants were split into four groups based on their degree of optimism, which was measured using questions about whether an individual thinks positively, views the future as purposeful and fulfilling, has a need to achieve new things, and has a sense of happiness and joy.

Over 9 years of follow-up, 397 deaths occurred. Compared to individuals with highly negative thinking, those with high levels of positive thinking were 55% less likely to die. The protective effect of optimism was slightly stronger in men than in women.

Reporting in the *Archives of General Psychiatry*, the Dr. Giltay notes: "A predisposition toward optimism seemed to provide a survival benefit in elderly subjects with relatively short life expectancies otherwise."

It is thought that this may be due to optimists having greater coping skills than pessimists and complying with medical treatment if they do fall ill, improving health or a recovery process. Alternatively, a person's outlook is likely to significantly influence the immune and hormonal systems.

[Arch Gen Psychiatry 2004; 61: 1126-1135](#)