

Optimism May Help You Live Longer

Having an Optimistic Outlook May Lower the Risk of Heart Disease, Other Risks of Death

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Nov. 1, 2004 -- Seeing the glass as half full rather than half empty may pay off in terms of a longer, healthier life, according to new research.

The study shows that older people who described themselves as highly optimistic have a lower risk of heart disease or death from any cause over nearly 10 years compared with people who are very pessimistic.

Researchers say depression has long been known to increase the risk of death due to heart disease, but less is known about the effects of an optimistic attitude.

The results of the study appear in the November issue of the Archives of General Psychiatry.

Optimism Prolongs Life

In the study researchers surveyed about 1,000 men and women aged 65-85 about their health, morale, optimism, self-respect, and relationships. Based on the participants' answers about optimism, researchers divided them into four groups according to their level of optimism.

After nearly 10 years of follow-up, researchers found that compared with people who reported a high level of pessimism, those who were very optimistic had a 55% lower risk of death from all causes and a 23% lower risk of heart-related death.

The study also showed that optimism's protective effect was stronger in men than in women for reducing the risk of death due to any cause except heart-related death.

Researchers say there are several factors that may explain the link between optimism and longer life. For example:

Optimism is associated with more physical activity, moderate alcohol use in women, and less smoking.

Optimism is associated with better health in general. People in poor health tend to report more pessimism.

Optimists may cope with stress differently and more effectively than pessimists do.