

Happiness is About Attitude

Happiness in old age may have more to do with attitude than actual health, a new study suggests. Researchers examined 500 Americans age 60 to 98 that live independently and had dealt with cancer, heart disease, diabetes, mental health conditions or a range of other problems. The participants rated their own degree of successful aging on scale of 1-10, with 10 being best. Despite their ills, the average rating was 8.4.

"What is most interesting about this study is that people who think they are aging well are not necessarily the (healthiest) individuals," said lead researcher Dilip Jeste of the University of California at San Diego. "In fact, optimism and effective coping styles were found to be more important to successfully aging than traditional measures of health and wellness," Jeste said. "These findings suggest that physical health is not the best indicator of successful aging—attitude is. The commonly used criteria suggest that a person is aging well if they have a low level of disease and disability," Jeste said. "However, this study shows that self-perception about aging can be more important than the traditional success markers."

The new study also shows that people who spent time each day socializing, reading or participating in other hobbies rated their aging satisfaction higher. "For most people, worries about their future aging involve fear of physical infirmity, disease or disability," Jeste said. "However, this study is encouraging because it shows that the best predictors of successful aging are well within an individual's control."