

3 BOOST HEALTH & IMMUNITY

A recent 10-year study of 1739 men and women conducted by Columbia University in New York found that happiness could protect against heart disease just as negative emotions could increase the risk of suffering from a cardiovascular-related illness. It concluded that the happiest people were at least 22% less likely to develop heart disease than those who were considered unhappy.

A 30-year study conducted by the prestigious Mayo Clinic found that optimistic people generally live longer than pessimistic people. In the study, those categorised

DID YOU KNOW? Women in an unhappy marriage have an increased risk of heart disease.

— University of Utah, 2009

as pessimistic were found to have a risk of death 19% higher than optimists. "Optimists are likely to live five to nine years longer than pessimists," explains Dr Sharp.

Happy people also seem to experience less illness and recover far quicker when sick. The reason behind this may be that happier people tend to have lower levels of cortisol, a hormone manufactured by the adrenal gland in times of stress and which has a compromising effect on the immune system, according to research conducted by Dr Richard Davidson from the University of Wisconsin. This suggests that optimists respond less to stress – and its associated impact on health – than pessimists do.

4 HAPPINESS BREEDS SUCCESS

Research conducted by Professor Sonja Lyubomirsky from the University of California involving more than 275,000 people found happy people are generally more successful than unhappy ones, in virtually every aspect of life, including work, relationships, family and social life.

They also concluded that happiness generally comes before success, rather than success leading to happiness.

LAUGHING FOR LONGEVITY

He who laughs longest lives longest. So says **Cris Popp**, laughter therapist.

"Laughter actually causes blood pressure reduction, improves our mood by releasing endorphins, boosts our T-cell count and relieves stress," he says. "It can even help you lose weight. Laughing for 10 to 15 minutes burns the same amount of calories as you would find in a medium-sized chocolate bar. One minute of laughing is as good as 10 minutes on a rowing machine."

"Happy people have better quality relationships, are less likely to get divorced, often earn more money and are more likely to get promoted in the workplace," says Dr Sharp.

"That doesn't mean if you're incompetent but happy you'll succeed. But if there are two people with equivalent qualifications and one is more positive then he's more likely to get the job, get promoted and earn more money."

5 THE WEIGHT-LOSS LINK

An optimistic approach to life can help when it comes to weight management, just as what you eat can affect the way you think. "The link between diet and mood is a big one," says Kathleen Alleaume, exercise physiologist and nutritionist. Similarly, Dr Sharp believes that working on your happiness can be an effective weight-loss tool. "Most people do it the wrong way around," he says. "The 'when I eat better and lose weight I'll be happy' equation just doesn't work that well because you're fighting a lot of negativity and that's hard. So, flip it around: feel good first, then you can see the goal more clearly, feel more confident and motivated." ■■■

Not funny any more 60 years ago people laughed 3 times more per day than they do today, despite a huge increase in material wealth, according to research. We also laugh less as we get older: children laugh around 30 times a day, adults only 15.