

- Lifestyles / Longevity

## Healthy habits can add 20 years to your life

### Keeping up exercise and good diet while avoiding binge drinking boosts longevity, study finds

The Daily Telegraph · 25 Jul 2023 · 1 · By Sarah Knapton SCIENCE EDITOR

Eight habits could lengthen your life by more than 20 years, scientists have found. Exercising, not smoking, not binge drinking, keeping stress down, eating and sleeping well, avoiding opioids, and healthy relationships are the keys to a long life. Men who have all eight at age 40 would be predicted to live an average of 24 years longer than men with none. However, for women, having all eight in middle age was associated with 21 additional years of life compared to women with none.

STICKING to eight healthy habits could lengthen your life by more than 20 years, scientists have found.

Exercising, not smoking, not binge drinking, keeping stress levels down, eating well, sleeping well, avoiding opioids, and having healthy relationships are the keys to a long life. Men who have all eight habits at age 40 would be predicted to live an average of 24 years longer than men with none of these habits.

However, for women, having all eight healthy lifestyle factors in middle age was associated with a predicted 21 additional years of life compared to women with none of these habits.

Low physical activity, opioid use and smoking had the biggest impact on lifespan, increasing the risk of death during the study period by between 30 and 45 per cent.

Stress, binge drinking, poor diet and poor sleep hygiene were each associated with around a 20 per cent increase in the risk of death, while a lack of positive social relationships was associated with a 5 per cent increased risk of death.

In one of the largest studies to date, researchers looked at lifestyle and medical records from 719,147 people who were enrolled in the Veterans Affairs Million Veteran Program in the US between 2011-2019.

Dr Xuan-mai Nguyen, health science specialist at the Department of Veterans Affairs at Carle Illinois College of Medicine, said: "We were really surprised by just how much could be gained with the adoption of one, two, three, or all eight lifestyle factors.

"Our research findings suggest that adopting a healthy lifestyle is important for both public health and personal wellness.

"The earlier the better, but even if you only make a small change in your 40s, 50s, or 60s, it still is beneficial." Researchers said the findings underscore the role of lifestyle factors in contributing to chronic diseases, such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, that lead to disability and premature death.

The results also help to quantify the degree to which making healthy lifestyle choices can help people reduce their risk of such diseases and live longer.

The estimated gain in life expectancy from adopting the eight healthy lifestyle factors grew slightly smaller with age but remained significant, meaning that adopting healthier

habits at an older age can still help you live longer.

However, researchers said it was “never too late” to give up bad habits and start living more healthily.

The findings align with a growing body of research supporting the role of lifestyle factors in preventing chronic diseases and promoting healthy ageing.

“Lifestyle medicine is aimed at treating the underlying causes of chronic diseases rather than their symptoms,” added Dr Nguyen.

“It provides a potential avenue for altering the course of ever-increasing healthcare costs resulting from prescription medicine and surgical procedures. It is never too late to adopt a healthy lifestyle.”

The research was presented at Nutrition 2023, the annual meeting of the American Society for Nutrition being held in Boston.

‘We were really surprised by just how much could be gained with the adoption of one, two or all factors’.