

Researchers confirm attitude to aging can have a direct effect on health

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Negative attitudes to ageing affect both physical and cognitive health in later years, new research reveals. The study from the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), at Trinity College Dublin, further reveals that participants with positive attitudes towards ageing had improved cognitive ability.

Key findings:

- Older adults with [negative attitudes](#) towards ageing had slower walking speed and worse [cognitive abilities](#) two years later, compared to older adults with more [positive attitudes](#) towards ageing.
- This was true even after participants' medications, mood, their life circumstances and other health changes that had occurred over the same two-year period were accounted for.
- Furthermore, negative attitudes towards ageing seemed to affect how different health conditions interacted. Frail older adults are at risk of multiple health problems including worse cognition. In the TILDA sample frail participants with negative attitudes towards ageing had worse cognition compared to participants who were not frail. However frail participants with positive attitudes towards ageing had the same level of cognitive ability as their non-frail peers.

Speaking about the findings, lead researcher Dr Deirdre Robertson commented: "The way we think about, talk about and write about ageing may have direct effects on health. Everyone will grow older and if negative attitudes towards ageing are carried throughout life they can have a detrimental, measurable effect on mental, physical and [cognitive health](#)."

Principal Investigator of TILDA, Professor Rose Anne Kenny, added: "Researchers and policy makers can work together to develop and implement societal-wide interventions to target attitudes and perhaps, ultimately, find novel ways of maintaining health in later life."

Data from TILDA provides a unique opportunity to study attitudes towards ageing as it tracks health changes over time in a nationally representative sample of community-dwelling [older adults](#).

These latest findings have important implications for media, policymakers, practitioners and society more generally. Societal attitudes towards ageing are predominantly negative. Everyone will grow older and if these attitudes persist they will continue to diminish quality of life.

More information: Deirdre A. Robertson et al. Negative perceptions of aging modify the association between frailty and cognitive function in older adults, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2015). [DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2015.12.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2015.12.010)

Provided by Trinity College Dublin

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