



# e-quilibrium

- *"electronic briefs on behavior and health"*

Volume 1, Number 2

February 2005

## Welcoming Birthdays

One of the occasions that will happen (or already has) for each of you this year is having a birthday. Considering the alternative, we want to have a birthday each year. However, one's birthday is a time when many adults lament getting older. There are multiple negative stereotypes about aging in our society, and the evidence suggests that we tend to assume that the stereotypes do or will apply to ourselves.

What does this have to do with health? Perhaps up to 7.5 years of additional life! In 1975, adults in Oxford, Ohio ranging in age from 50-94 were recruited for participation in the Ohio Longitudinal Study of Aging and Retirement. Recent analysis of 660 of these individuals found that having positive self-perceptions of aging, compared to negative self-perceptions of aging, was associated with living 7.5 years longer. And this was the case after statistically removing the effects of age, gender, socioeconomic status, loneliness, and functional health. For the purpose of comparison, gains of 1-4 years of life are associated with having low systolic blood pressure, low cholesterol, a lower body mass index, no history of smoking, or regular exercise.

How do attitudes toward aging affect longevity? Clearly one of the pathways is health behavior. The adults in this study who had positive attitudes toward aging reported practicing more positive health behaviors over the two decade period... less alcohol consumption, healthier diet, more exercise, taking

medications as prescribed, using seatbelts, less tobacco use, and regular visits to the doctor.

As you think about getting older, push the negative stereotypes of aging out of your mind and replace them with the following:

- Older adults tend to be happier than young adults.
- Most older adults are not lonely.
- Typical cognitive changes with aging do not impair daily functioning.
- Most older adults adapt successfully to physical difficulties that may occur.
- Continuing to use cognitive and physical capabilities is associated with less decline in these abilities.

Welcome your birthday this year! The more we own and share positive attitudes toward aging, the greater the likelihood that we will have more years of quality life with like-minded family and friends.

Paul J. Hershberger, Ph.D.

... is a clinical health psychologist. He is an Associate Professor of Family Medicine, and Director of Behavioral Science for the Dayton Community Family Practice Residency Program, Wright State University School of Medicine. His clinical practice includes psychotherapy, consultation, and coaching.

---

To subscribe to this e-newsletter, send an e-mail message to [requests@somlist.wright.edu](mailto:requests@somlist.wright.edu) and put the following in the subject line:  
subscribe som\_e-equilibrium

If you do not wish to receive this e-newsletter, send an e-mail message to [requests@somlist.wright.edu](mailto:requests@somlist.wright.edu) and put the following in the subject line:  
unsubscribe som\_e-equilibrium

If you wish to read previous newsletters, you may find them at:  
[www.med.wright.edu/fm/res/equilibrium/](http://www.med.wright.edu/fm/res/equilibrium/)

To contact Dr. Hershberger:  
e-mail: paul.hershberger@wright.edu  
phone: (937) 278-6251, ext 2021