

Press release**Universität Greifswald****Jan Meßerschmidt**

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<http://idw-online.de/en/news791380>Miscellaneous scientific news/publications
Medicine
transregional, national**How to Live 13 Years Longer Without Miracle Pills and Anti-Ageing Stress****A key to longer life: people live 13 years longer if they perceive ageing as a process of development. Researchers at University Medicine Greifswald were able to show that people who associate ageing with personal goals and plans can expect to live far longer.**

In this context, psychosocial factors are often neglected, although their enormous potential has been known for decades. Two researchers from University Medicine Greifswald, Prof. Susanne Wurm and Dr. Sarah Schäfer, have now come to the conclusion in the international "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology" that our views of ageing can lead to a 13-year difference in life expectancy. In 1996, 2,400 participants in the German Ageing Survey, then aged between 40 and 85, were asked about their views on ageing. Over the following 23 years, records were kept of who died and when, with a total of 871 deaths.

"We already knew from a study published in 2002 by B. R. Levy examining 660 people in the U.S. (also over a period of 23 years) that people with a positive view on ageing lived 7 years longer. Our study now provides evidence on a larger scale for Germany that people who perceive ageing as a process of development live up to 13 years longer," says Professor Susanne Wurm. She heads the Department of Prevention Research and Social Medicine at the Institute of Community Medicine, University Medicine Greifswald. A renowned researcher on ageing, she has been studying the role of perceptions of ageing and old age on health and longevity for many years.

Throughout the world, populations are ageing at an unprecedented pace and intensity. This demographic change will affect nearly every aspect of society. The World Health Organization has therefore proclaimed the years 2021 to 2030 as the Decade of Healthy Ageing and set the goal of questioning perceptions of age and reducing ageism.

In contrast to the earlier study, the present study did not restrict itself to examining how generally positive views on ageing effected longevity. Instead, the present study also differentiated between people's different views on ageing in specific domains of life. This made it possible to compare which of these views are significant for a long life.

"Many people do not view ageing solely in positive or negative terms. In fact, they distinguish between different areas of life. We have now been able to show for the first time that people who associate ageing with personal development, i.e. those who want to realise various ideas and plans and continue to learn new things actually live longer. What is remarkable is that it is comparatively irrelevant for a long life, whether or not people associate ageing with physical or social losses" says Susanne Wurm. And her co-author, Dr. Sarah Schäfer, adds, "We know from many other studies which psychological and health-related factors contribute to longevity. We included these in our study to make sure that views on ageing can explain longevity beyond factors that are already known. And this is indeed the case."

"The findings provide sound evidence of the importance of supporting adults in actively managing their ageing. The archenemy of healthy ageing appears to be the attitude of setting limits on oneself, claiming it is too late for certain plans and activities. People learn negative views on ageing throughout their lives and therefore tend to apply them to themselves when they are old. It is important to overcome this self-discrimination with regard to one's own age,"

concludes Susanne Wurm.

Figure: Schematic illustration of the effect of gain-related self-perceptions of ageing on mortality. People who perceive ageing as a process of development live up to 13 years longer.

Link to figure https://www.uni-greifswald.de/storages/uni-greifswald/1_Universitaet/1.1_Information/1.1.o_Aktuelles/1.1.o.1_Medieninformationen/Medieninfo.PDF/infos-2022/Alternative_Schematic_Illustration.png

Publication:

Wurm, S., & Schäfer, S. K. (2022, online first). Gain- But Not Loss-Related Self-Perceptions of Aging Predict Mortality Over a Period of 23 Years: A Multidimensional Approach. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. Link to online publication. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1037/pspp0000412>

Brief Biographies:

Prof. Dr. Susanne Wurm heads the Department of Prevention Research and Social Medicine at the Institute of Community Medicine, University Medicine Greifswald. Her research focuses on the topic of healthy ageing, in particular the role of views on ageing for health and longevity. In 2016, she was awarded the Baltes Prize by the Gerontological Association of America (GSA) for this work.

Dr. Sarah K. Schäfer worked as a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Prevention Research and Social Medicine and moved to the Leibniz Institute for Resilience Research (LIR) in Mainz in 2021. Her work focuses on psychological resilience across the lifespan and the systematic synthesis of research findings. In 2021, she received the Eduard Martin Prize for outstanding doctoral theses from the Saarland University Society for her doctorate.

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