Parenthood linked to longer life, says new study of 1.4 million Swedes

In other health news: fruit and veg consumption also provide lifespan boost, says meta-analysis; and health care tourism expected to grow by 25 per cent annually

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Parents, take courage. If you survive the sleep deprivation, toddler tantrums and teenage angst, you may be rewarded with a longer life than your childless peers, researchers have said. Fathers gained more in life expectancy than mothers, a team wrote in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health* – and particularly in older age. “By the age of 60, the difference in life expectancy … may be as much as two years” between people with children and those without, they concluded.

Researchers tracked the lifespan of men and women born between 1911 and 1925 and living in Sweden – more than 1.4 million people in total. They also gathered data on whether the participants had children. Men and women with at least one child had “lower death risks” than childless ones, the team concluded. “At 60 years of age, the difference in life expectancy was two years for men and 1.5 years for women” compared to peers with no kids, the researchers wrote.

By age 80, men who fathered children had a remaining life expectancy of seven years and eight months, compared to seven years for childless men, said the team. For mothers, life expectancy at 80 was nine years and six months, while for childless women it was eight years and 11 months. The study merely pointed out a correlation, and cannot conclude that having children is the cause of the life expectancy gains, the researchers admitted. But they theorised that parents may benefit from social and financial support from their children in older age, which childless people lose out on.

[There may be a third pillar of physical fitness beyond diet and exercise](http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/health-beauty/article/2078646/there-may-be-third-pillar-physical-fitness-beyond-diet-and)

It could also be that childless people have unhealthier lifestyles than parents do. The association between having children and longer life was found in married and unmarried people, but appeared to be strongest in single, older men, said the study. This could be because unmarried men relied more heavily on their offspring in the absence of a partner. The study did not echo previous research which found that having daughters is more beneficial for longevity than sons. *AFP*

**Fruit and veg key to longevity, says British research**

Your mother was right. If you want to live a healthier, longer life, eat lots of fruit and vegetables – up to 10 daily servings. That’s about twice as much as most health groups now recommend. The recommendation of doubling up on fruit and vegetables is a result of a meta-analysis of 95 studies conducted by scientists from Imperial College London. The British researchers discovered that a diet that includes 10 daily servings of whole plant foods leads to lower rates of heart attack, stroke and cancer. They estimated that as many as 7.8 million premature deaths would be avoided each year worldwide if we followed this diet. While the study did not prove a strict cause-and-effect link, it may offer yet another reason to eat healthily. So how much is 10 servings? Roughly that’s 800 grams of produce: 10 small bananas or apples, or 30 tablespoons of cooked spinach, peas, broccoli or cauliflower.

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“Fruits and vegetables have been shown to reduce cholesterol levels, blood pressure, and to boost the health of our blood vessels and immune system,” said study author Dagfinn Aune, of the School of Public Health at Imperial College London. “This may be due to the complex network of nutrients they hold. For instance, they contain many antioxidants, which may reduce DNA damage, and lead to a reduction in cancer risk.” Some vegetables and fruits were more salubrious than others. Researchers said that apples, pears, citrus fruits, green leafy vegetables, cruciferous vegetables (a group that includes broccoli, cabbage and cauliflower), and green and yellow vegetables (green beans, spinach, carrots and peppers) seemed to be best.

Researchers concede not everyone will be as diligent in their consumption of the good stuff, but even eating 200 grams of produce daily – about two-and-a-half portions – is still associated with reductions in heart disease, stroke, cancer and cardiovascular disease, researchers added. The study, published in the *International Journal of Epidemiology*, analysed information for two million people, and studied as many as 43,000 cases of heart disease, 47,000 cases of stroke, 81,000 cases of cardiovascular disease, 112,000 cancer cases and 94,000 deaths. *AP*

**Medical tourism expected to grow up to 25 per cent annually**

Medical tourism has grown into a healthy travel sector as people shop beyond their borders for everything from dental work to plastic surgery, say experts at Berlin’s ITB travel fair. This year is the first that the global tourism show has set aside space in the halls of the German capital’s congress centre for the emerging sector. Health tourism is already worth billions of dollars per year and set to grow at up to 25 per cent annually over the coming decade, according to a recent study by Visa and Oxford Economics.

A growing middle class, often from countries without high-quality health care, “know that there are treatments out there for them”, said Julie Munro, president of the Medical Travel Quality Alliance, which produces a ranking of the 10 best hospitals for medical tourists. But medical tourism is not limited to a few countries, nor to people from wealthier nations travelling to less pricey ones. Countries like the United States, Turkey, Thailand, Singapore, Spain and Germany see both inward and outward flows, as patients dodge waiting lists or hunt for care that is either unavailable or too expensive in their own country.

Medical tourists are also often concerned with security in destination countries. Eye care specialist Worldeye, for example, expects more clients to opt for its sites in Amsterdam or Frankfurt than for Istanbul or Antalya as Turkey struggles with political tensions. Dubai has made big bets on medical tourism since 2012, concentrating on seven specialities where the city has the capacity take on extra patients without affecting care for locals. Some 42 treatment centres have been singled out for their focus on taking in foreign patients. *AFP*