Good news for optimists: Being upbeat can PROLONG your life

PUBLISHED: 01:01, Thu, Nov 17, 2016

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

BEING upbeat and optimistic really can prolong your life, a new study found.

People who were deeply pessimistic had a 2.2-fold higher risk of dying from coronary heart disease (CHD) than those with a less negative outlook.



CHD is one of the leading causes of death in the UK killing more than 73,000 each year - about one in six men and one in 10 women.

There are an estimated 2.3 million people living with CHD and around two million people affected by angina or chest pains - the most common symptom of coronary heart disease.

It can also trigger heart attacks and heart failure.

The Finnish study is the first to examine CHD mortality and its association with optimism and pessimism as independent variables.

Lead author Dr Mikko Pankalainen at the Department of Psychiatry, Paijat-Hame Central Hospital, said: "High levels of pessimism have previously been linked to factors that affect cardiac health, such as inflammation, but data on the connection between risk of death from CHD and optimism and pessimism as personality traits are relatively scarce.

"Levels of pessimism can be measured quite easily and pessimism might be a very useful tool together with other known risk factors such as diabetes, hypertension or smoking to determine the risk of CHD-induced mortality."

The study involved 2,267 middle aged and older Finnish men and women.

It found people with high levels of pessimism seemed to have a higher risk of CHD-induced mortality, even after adjusting for known physiological risk factors.

Dr Pankalainen noted previous research treated optimism and pessimism as opposites on a continuous scale rendered conflicting results, particularly regarding associations between optimism and CHD-related deaths.

Of the 121 men and women who died from CHD during the study's 11 year follow-up period, they had been more pessimistic at the start than people who were still alive at follow-up.

However, there was no difference between the groups in optimism, suggesting that pessimism alone mediates the effect on CHD mortality.

The study used data from participants aged between 52 and 76 collected in 2002 as part of the GOAL (Good Ageing in Lahti region) study.

The GOAL data provided information on socioeconomic status, psychosocial background, and lifestyle, as well as health data including blood glucose levels, blood pressure, use of hypertension or diabetes drugs, and prior diagnoses of CHD.

At the start participants filled out the revised version of the Life Orientation Test (LOT-R), a questionnaire.

These included six statements, three of which indicate optimism - for example "in uncertain times, I usually expect the best" - and three of which indicate pessimism, for example "if something can go wrong for me, it will".

Respondents were asked to indicate how well these statements described them, as expressed on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much so).

Dr Pankalainen said observational studies can show possible links between risk of death from CHD and pessimism, but they cannot show cause and effect because other factors may play a role.

The study is also limited because it relies on people self reporting their levels of optimism and pessimism.

The study was published in the journal BMC Public Health.