

Older Folks Seem to Gain 'Emotional Intelligence'

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TUESDAY, Dec. 28 (HealthDay News) -- One positive aspect of aging is that it appears that people really do grow wiser as they grow older, researchers say.

Older people are better than younger people at seeing the positive side of stressful situations and empathizing with the less fortunate, according to the results of a study at the University of California, Berkeley.

The study findings support the theory that emotional intelligence and cognitive (or thinking) skills can actually improve as people enter their 60s, giving them an advantage in personal relationships and in the workplace.

"Increasingly, it appears that the meaning of late life centers on social relationships and caring for and being cared for by others. Evolution seems to have tuned our nervous system in ways that are optimal for these kinds of interpersonal and compassionate activities as we age," study team leader and psychologist Robert Levenson said in a UC Berkeley news release.

He and his colleagues conducted a series of studies examining how our emotional strategies and responses change as we age. One study included 144 people in their 20s, 40s and 60s who watched neutral, sad and disgusting film clips.

The older people were best at reinterpreting negative scenes in positive ways by using a technique called positive reappraisal, which is a coping mechanism that relies heavily on life experiences and learned lessons.

The participants in their 20s and 40s were better at tuning out and diverting attention away from unpleasant scenes, a technique called detached reappraisal, the study authors noted.

The researchers concluded that "older adults may be better served by staying socially engaged and using positive reappraisal to deal with stressful challenging situations rather than disconnecting from situations that offer opportunities to enhance quality of life."

The study findings were published over the past year in the journal *Psychology and Aging*.