



Negative views of older people may be bad for your health

A study from the [Yale School of Public Health](#) gives new meaning to the adage "You're only as old as you think." A researcher there finds that younger people who have strong negative images about the elderly are more likely to have strokes and heart problems when they grow old, according to a university press release.

More than 400 people, age 18 to 49, were surveyed on their age stereotypes. Thirty years later, 25% of those with more negative age stereotypes - such as the belief that the elderly are feeble or helpless - had suffered a heart problem or stroke, while only 13% of those with more positive age stereotypes experienced a heart problem or stroke. The study appears in the March issue of the journal *Psychological Science*.

Becca R. Levy, associate professor of epidemiology and psychology at Yale is the study's lead author. In earlier studies, Levy and colleagues found that negative ideas about age can increase stress and decrease the likelihood that the person will live healthfully, increasing the risk of poor cardiovascular health.

Author and physician [Andrew Weill](#) agrees that optimism is key to healthy aging, with the most successful people being those who anticipate being able to cope with the changes of growing older and maintaining control over their lives.

These negative views of the elderly affect more than just the health of the attitude holder. The site [Older Workers](#) notes that such attitudes perpetuate the myths that older people can't learn new technology and are less adaptable to change.

Actress Jane Fonda, 71, has a well-known quote about aging: "Women are not forgiven for aging. Robert Redford's lines of distinction are my old-age wrinkles." Age obviously has not slowed her down. She's starring on Broadway in the play *33 Variations*.

The poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow may have said it best: *Age is opportunity no less/than youth itself, though in another dress,/And as the evening twilight fades away/The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.*

AP photo by Peter Kramer of Jane Fonda at a photo session for her new Broadway play.

-- By [Sue Kelly](#), USA TODAY

Posted on February 24, 2009 in [Heart health](#), [Senior health care](#), [Watercooler](#), [Women's health](#) | [Permalink](#) |

<http://blogs.usatoday.com/betterlife/2009/02/negative-views.html>