

No Surprise: New Yale Study Shows Negative Beliefs Can Increase Chances of Alzheimer's

Los Angeles, Calif. Dec. 14, 2015—A new Yale School of Public Health study is the first to link negative beliefs to brain changes that can cause Alzheimer's. The findings are consistent with a multitude of studies that show what we think has a profound physiological impact on our body, says Dr. Noelle Nelson, psychologist and author of the just released [Happy Healthy...Dead](#).

"Not only are positive beliefs now shown to protect against Alzheimer's, but an appreciative, grateful, happy and optimistic outlook can result in better cardiovascular health and lower blood pressure which can lead to longer life," says Nelson.

The Yale study authors used MRIs to examine healthy, dementia-free subjects from the [Baltimore Longitudinal Study of Aging](#), the nation's longest-running scientific study of human aging. Researchers found that participants with more negative beliefs about aging showed a greater decline in the volume of the hippocampus, a part of the brain crucial to memory, than those who had beliefs that are more positive. Less hippocampus volume is a sign of Alzheimer's disease.

"Your thoughts and emotions are in fact cellular signals that are involved in the process of translating information into physical reality," says Nelson. "It turns out that what we think and feel have far greater impact on our physical well-being, and to happy, healthy longevity than we may realize."

The study was led by Becca Levy, associate professor of public health and of psychology. "We believe it is the stress generated by the negative beliefs about aging that individuals sometimes internalize from society that can result in pathological brain changes," says Levy. "Although the findings are concerning, it is encouraging to realize that these negative beliefs about aging can be mitigated and positive beliefs about aging can be reinforced, so that the adverse impact is not inevitable." The findings were published online Dec. 7 in the journal *Psychology and Aging*.

To learn more about the mind-physical body connection, watch a YouTube presentation by Nelson at <https://youtu.be/7xcqg4TbGgA>.

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