

## Happy minds = healthy hearts



**In a review of more than 200 studies, researchers at the Harvard School of Public Health found that Positive Psychological Wellbeing (PPWB) may reduce the rate and, progression of cardiovascular disease, the world's biggest killer.**

A positive outlook may do more than just boost your mood. It might offer protection from cardiovascular disease.

People with greater wellbeing have a reduced risk of having a heart attack or stroke," said lead author Julia Boehm from the Harvard School of Public Health. She said that of the studies her team reviewed, some reported a 50% reduced risk of heart disease amongst optimists, compared to less optimistic people.

The researchers also found that PPWB may offer protection from cardiovascular disease, regardless of body weight, age, smoking status, and other traditional risk factors.

While it is not known exactly how a positive outlook can reduce cardiovascular disease-risk, Boehm said an ability to cope may help explain the link. "Wellbeing may be associated with better cardiovascular health because happier and more optimistic people are better able to cope with stress, regulate their behaviours, and manage their goals and aspirations." She also said that happier people tend to engage in healthier behaviours, such as exercise, and have better overall health, such as lower blood pressure.

While Boehm acknowledged that there were some limitations to her review, she pointed out that their research can contribute to the fight against cardiovascular disease.

It's a disease that kills millions of people around the world every year.

"Our findings suggest that positive psychological wellbeing is one factor among many that contribute to cardiovascular health. A focus on bolstering psychological strengths (e.g. optimism) in addition to repairing psychological deficits (e.g. symptoms of depression) may improve cardiovascular outcomes."

### **So, how can I boost my mood?**

If you're a 'glass half empty' kind of person, the obvious question arises 'How do I improve my mood to boost my cardiovascular health?' Unfortunately, research in this area is limited.

However, Boehm does refer to the work of Sonja Lyubomirsky, Professor of Psychology at the University of California and author of *The How of Happiness*. According to Prof. Lyubomirsky, there are simple strategies people can use to improve their level of happiness.

Some of these strategies include:

1. Express gratitude.
2. Don't over think things – it can promote negative feelings.
3. Hug people – human contact can boost mood.
4. Participate in regular exercise.
5. Interact with others – develop friendships and seize opportunities to get involved.