

Why Older People Managed to Stay Happier Through the Pandemic

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For all its challenges to mental health, this year of the plague also put psychological science to the test, and in particular one of its most consoling truths: that age and emotional well-being tend to increase together, as a rule, even as mental acuity and physical health taper off.

The finding itself is solid. Compared with young adults, people aged 50 and over score consistently higher, or more positively, on a wide variety of daily emotions. They tend to experience more positive emotions in a given day and fewer negative ones, independent of income or education, in national samples (work remains to be done in impoverished, rural and immigrant communities).

But that happiness gap always has begged for a clear explanation. Do people somehow develop better coping skills as they age?

Or is the answer more straightforward: Do people sharpen their avoidance skills, reducing the number of stressful situations and bad risks they face as they get older?

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