

ncds

**National Child
Development Study**

A focus on health

UPDATE 2016

The relationship between marital status and health

Many studies have shown that people who are divorced end up in worse health than people in stable marriages. But NCDS has proven that the relationship between our marital status and our health is not that simple.

Researchers from the UCL Institute of Education, London School of Economics and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine have used the information you gave us to show that people who experience the upheaval of divorce or separation, but later remarry or move in with a new partner, have very similar levels of health in middle age as those in stable marriages.

What we asked you

Every time we've visited you since your early 20s, you've let us know about your relationship status. For some of you, this has changed over the years, but for others it has stayed the same.

When you were in your mid-40s, specially-trained nurses came to your homes to carry out medical checks. They recorded information about your health, as well as taking blood samples and measures of your lung function.

Love is in the air

In 2014, there were more than 3 million cohabiting partnerships, and 12.5 million married couples in the UK. According to research by the Office for National Statistics, there were 118,000 divorces in England and Wales in 2012.

Among your generation, about two thirds got married in your 20s or early 30s, and were still



married to the same person when you reached your 40s. Just over 8 per cent of men and 6 per cent of women married in their 20s or early 30s, but later divorced and remarried or cohabitated with a new partner. Nearly everyone who had gone through a divorce or separation had been in a new relationship of some kind by their mid-40s.

By this age, those of you who had been through a divorce or separation were in almost identical health to those who had stayed in the same relationship. Study members who had neither married nor lived with a partner had the worst health in middle age, with higher likelihood of heart disease, high blood pressure and breathing problems.

Partnership status at age 55

Does not live with a partner

19%

23%

Lives with a spouse or civil partner

70.6%

67.7%

Lives with partner (not a spouse or civil partner)

10.5%

9.3%

Women Men

NCDS IN THE NEWS

The NCDS research on health and relationships was reported extensively by the media in the UK and internationally. Stories appeared in the Daily Telegraph, Times, Guardian, Sun and the Daily Mail, as well as in the New Zealand and Greek press. The findings were also discussed on BBC Radio 5 Live, LBC Radio and ITV's daytime chat show, *Loose Women*.



The importance of childhood mental health

More than 4 million people in the UK experienced mental health problems as children.

NCDS is helping make the case for better mental health services by demonstrating how mental health in childhood can relate to other areas of our lives as we get older. Findings have shown that for some people, childhood mental health is connected to earnings, employment and relationships later in life.

It's important to remember that not all people who experience mental health problems (or indeed other issues) as children are still affected by them in adulthood.

What we asked you

When you were children, we asked your parents questions about your health, including any problems you may have had. Throughout adulthood we have regularly asked you about your relationship status, earnings and employment.

Childhood mental health and adult outcomes

Economists from the UCL Institute of Education, Institute for Fiscal Studies and Rand Corporation found that

at age 23, those people who had experienced poor mental health growing up earned 20 per cent less than those who hadn't experienced these problems. At age 33, the difference was 24 per cent, and at age 50, earnings were almost a third less.

Those who experienced childhood mental health problems were also more likely to work fewer hours and be unemployed. Those who did marry often married partners

who earned less than average as well.

Improving mental health services for children

One of the study's co-authors, Dr James P. Smith said *"There should be a concerted effort to identify these issues earlier in childhood, and governments around the world should be investing far more heavily in identifying therapies which work. This could hugely improve many people's quality of life."*

HOW YOU'VE HELPED MAKE A DIFFERENCE

NCDS has already helped improve services for people who have been affected by poor mental health.

Vince Cable, former Secretary of State for Business Innovation and Skills, used research based on NCDS to show that further education can improve adults' wellbeing, and is particularly therapeutic for those suffering from depression. The research carried out at the UCL Institute of Education,

also found that learning for pleasure has a bigger impact on wellbeing than accredited learning.

The research was used to help make the case for a £20 million government programme for further education. The funding has since been used to run college courses that teach coping skills, such as how to sleep better and manage stress, as well as others on art, cultural and academic subjects.

Living on the coast can be good for your health

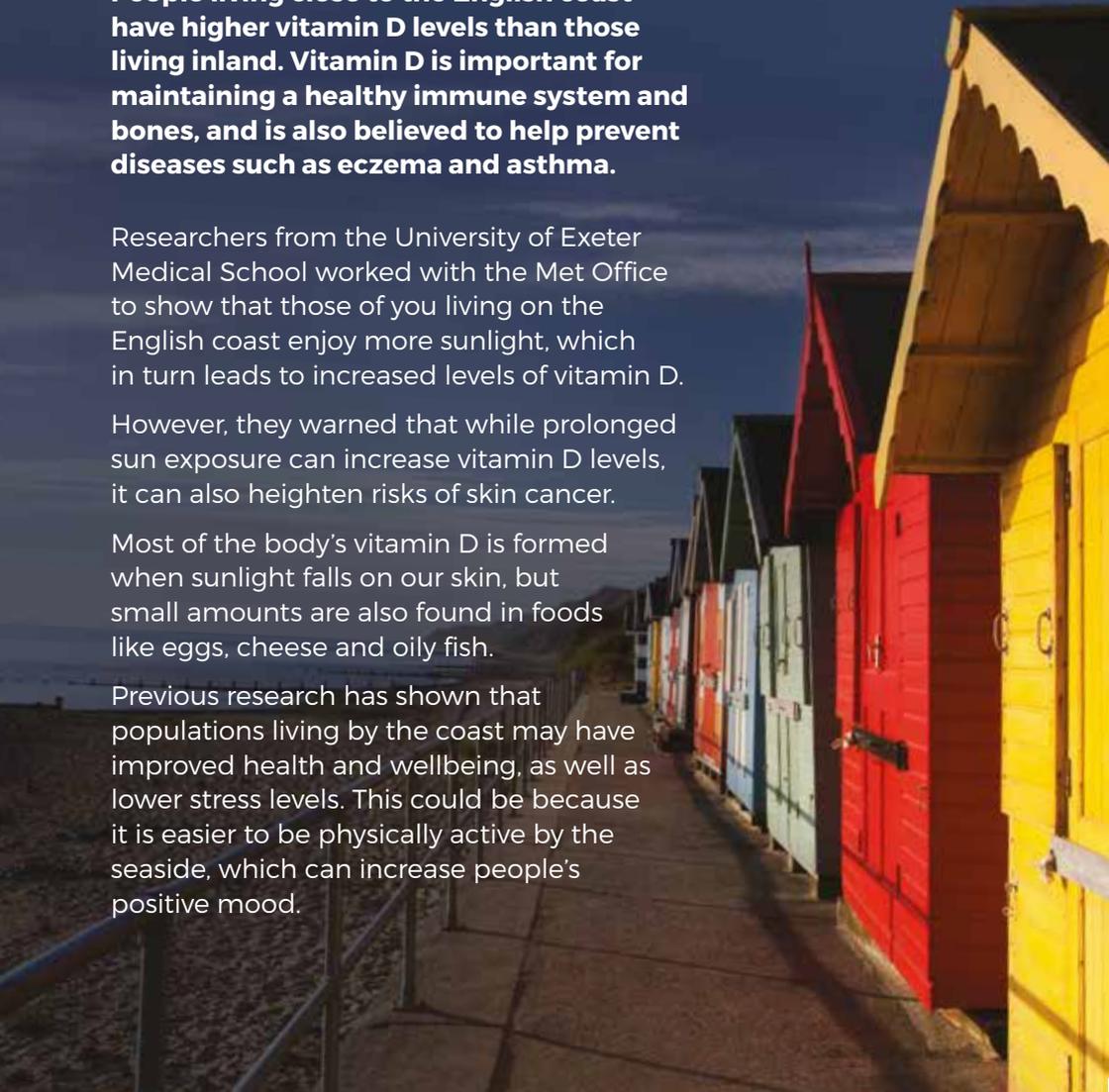
People living close to the English coast have higher vitamin D levels than those living inland. Vitamin D is important for maintaining a healthy immune system and bones, and is also believed to help prevent diseases such as eczema and asthma.

Researchers from the University of Exeter Medical School worked with the Met Office to show that those of you living on the English coast enjoy more sunlight, which in turn leads to increased levels of vitamin D.

However, they warned that while prolonged sun exposure can increase vitamin D levels, it can also heighten risks of skin cancer.

Most of the body's vitamin D is formed when sunlight falls on our skin, but small amounts are also found in foods like eggs, cheese and oily fish.

Previous research has shown that populations living by the coast may have improved health and wellbeing, as well as lower stress levels. This could be because it is easier to be physically active by the seaside, which can increase people's positive mood.



How you've helped fight common diseases

When you were in your mid-40s, trained nurses came to your homes to carry out health checks as part of a medically-focused NCDS visit. Research using DNA from the blood samples you gave has led to important breakthroughs in our understanding of the genetic underpinnings of common medical conditions such as diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and coronary heart disease.

Scientists were even able to find a new genetic link between type 1 diabetes and Crohn's disease, a bowel disorder that affects up to 60,000 people in the UK.

The results of the research, which was conducted by the Wellcome Trust Case Control Consortium, will assist healthcare professionals in identifying which genes are linked to certain conditions. This will help them understand

who is at greatest risk, and in turn may lead to improved diagnosis, treatments and disease prevention.

Your DNA samples were used alongside those of other blood donors. This allowed scientists to compare a 'control' group of healthy people to those who have certain diseases. By doing this, scientists can start to unpick which factors – or in this case genes – might be related to different medical conditions.

'Scientists were even able to find a new genetic link between type 1 diabetes and Crohn's disease'

Keeping in touch

If you change your address or phone number, please let us know so that we can contact you in the future.

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