

Health and the Modern Grandparent



A new study on the modern grandparent demonstrates the healthy impact that grandchildren have on their lives.

Improvements in education, socio-economic status, and healthcare have given today's grandparents the opportunity to enjoy a completely unique and unprecedented relationship with their grandchildren and, in some instances, great-grandchildren. In 1960, the average American life expectancy was 70. By 2018, the average American life expectancy had risen to 78.¹ Some demographers have even speculated that the first person who will live to be 150 is already alive today.² By 2030, more than 70% of U.S. 8-year-olds will have a living great-grandparent.³ And, grandchildren are providing just as many benefits to their grandparents as grandparents are providing to them.

Grandkids are the elixir of life.

A majority of grandparents (89%) feel that their relationship with their grandchildren nourishes their mental, social, and physical well-being. Half (51%) agree that having grandchildren has significant, positive health benefits for them. Two in three feel their grandchildren make them more sociable and physically active. The positive impact of grandchildren on grandparents highlights the importance of interaction, engagement, communication, and shared activities between these two generations of family. Indeed, researchers have found grandparents who spend time with grandkids by providing occasional babysitting live longer than grandparents who do not provide care.⁴

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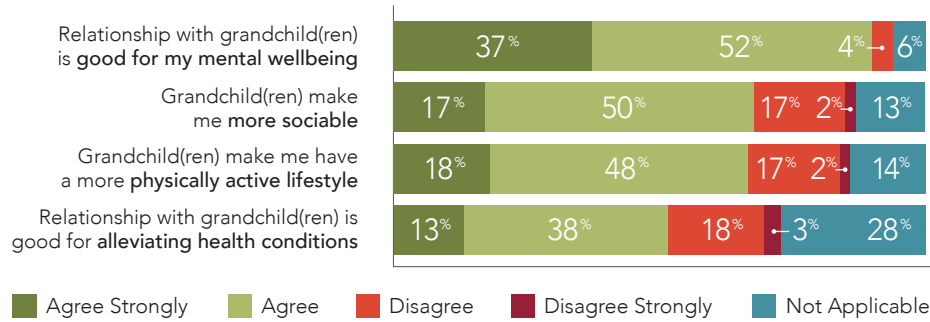
¹ Xu JQ, Murphy SL, Kochanek KD, Bastian B, Arias E. Deaths: Final data for 2016. National Vital Statistics Reports; vol 67 no 5. Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. 2018.

² AARP. Live to 100. Plan It. <https://www.aarp.org/politics-society/advocacy/info-2017/jeanne-calment-plan-to-live-to-100-jj.html>

³ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/products/databriefs/db267.htm>

⁴ <https://www.nhs.uk/news/older-people/grandparents-who-babysit-tend-to-live-longer/>

Health Benefits of Grandchildren



Grandchildren keep their grandparents busy.

Almost all (92%) grandparents have actively engaged with their grandchildren in the past year. Going out to eat and gathering for family celebrations are the top activities. One third of grandparents are engaged in a physical activity with their grandchildren, and almost half shop and go on outings. Grandparents also remain a key part of their grandchildren's nutritional education. Over a third (35%) cook together, and 46% say they are confident about giving advice on food and nutrition (the third highest conversation topic). However, the many who do not live near their grandchildren may only have the opportunity to engage in these activities once or twice a year.

Connecting with grandchildren staves off loneliness.



A third of adults age 45 and older report feeling lonely on a regular basis, and loneliness and social isolation have a significant impact on physical health.⁵ Grandparents are no exception. Slightly less than a third of grandparents sometimes or always feel like they lack companionship or feel left out, and those who report high levels of loneliness are less likely to say they are in good health (55%) compared to those who report low levels of loneliness (75%). But maintaining connections with family can help. In a longitudinal study, scientists found that the greater emotional support grandparents and grandchildren receive from one another, the better their psychological and physiological health.⁶

Opportunities

As people live longer lives, being socially engaged has positive physical, mental, and social implications for both grandparents and grandchildren. With distance being the biggest barrier between grandparents and grandchildren, providing opportunities for increased engagement will help maintain physical fitness and stave off loneliness.

Activities with Grandchildren in the Past 12 Months



⁵ AARP Foundation (2018). Loneliness and Social Connections. A National Survey of Adults 45 and Older. <https://www.aarp.org/research/topics/life/info-2018/loneliness-social-connections.html>

⁶ LiveScience (2013). Grandparents and Grandchildren Can Protect Each Other's Mental Health. <https://www.livescience.com/38807-grandparents-gr-andchildren-protect-mental-health.html>



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