

Good grades in high school lead to better health, study finds

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The "A" grades that high schoolers earn aren't just good for making the honor roll — they also make them healthier as adults, too.

Studies have long shown that education is linked to better [health](#), but new research by Pamela Herd, an associate professor of public affairs and sociology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, shows that higher academic performance in high school plays a critical role in better health throughout life.

"How well you do in school matters," Herd says about the findings, which were published in the December issue of the *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*. "We already know it matters for things like your work and your earnings, but this proves it also matters for your health."

The finding may come years — or decades — after someone is in a position to do something to earn better grades. But for those who are still in school, there's every reason to believe the link between academic performance and health exists for younger people, too, Herd says.

The conclusion relies on data from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, a groundbreaking survey that has involved more than 10,000 graduates of Wisconsin's high school class of 1957 during the last 53 years. UW-Madison researchers have gone back to the class members six times since they graduated, asking questions about work, life, family and now, as the class ages, health.

The report on academic performance and health looked at links between educational attainment, high school academic performance, personality and psychological characteristics, and late-life health among high school graduates.

Herd's findings showed that the higher a study participant's [high school](#) rank was, the lower the probability that participant experienced worsening health between 1992 and 2003, when the class members neared retirement age.

Researchers are still working to learn more about why academic performance leads to better health outcomes.

Herd says that she thought that conscientiousness would help explain the finding. Those who are more conscientious might both do better in school and also take better care of their health.

But the data don't support that finding, Herd says.

Instead, "what we're seeing is what you learn in school may actually matter for your health," Herd says, adding that there could be policy implications for the study. Because the study looks at a person's grades, "that tells us something about the consequences of emphasizing test scores over [academic performance](#), for example, and further speaks to the importance of schooling."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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