CultureCase

Help prevent depression in old age by staying culturally active

This research was conducted by **Daisy Fancourt** and **Urszula Tymoszuk** at **University College London**.

Summary

This paper explored whether cultural attendance by older adults is associated with a reduced risk of developing depression. The paper considered attendance to comprise visits to the theatre, concerts or opera, the cinema and art galleries, exhibitions or museums. It found that the more you attend the less chance there is of developing depression in old age. There was a 32 per cent lower risk of developing depression for people who attended every few months and a 48 per cent lower risk for people who attended once a month or more. This was regardless of the demographic characteristics, health conditions and wider social lives of the people in the study. The findings are based on data from just over 2,000 people who took part in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (a nationally representative sample of people aged over 50 living in England). The paper compares data from the same people in 2004/05 and 2014/15.

Depression is thought to be a major problem for older people

They are often at risk of physical and mental decline as well as social isolation. There is also known to be an under-diagnosing of depression in older people. Meanwhile, it is increasingly recognised that there is a relationship between positive mental health and cultural engagement.

What might be the special ingredient in arts attendance that staves off depression?

There are many components to attending the theatre or going to a museum, such as social interaction, being mentally stimulated, getting out of the house, and gentle physical activity: all of which may be the key ingredients of cultural engagement that helps prevent the development of depression.

Keywords

attendance **mental health** **survey** **UK**

Title	Cultural engagement and incident depression in older adults: evidence from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing
Author(s)	Fancourt, D. & Tymoszuk, U.
Publication date	2019
Source	The British Journal of Psychiatry, Vol. 214, Iss. 4, pp 225–229
Link	**https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/cultural-engagement-and-incident-depression-in-older-adults-evidence-from-the-english-longitudinal-study-of-ageing/F25**
Open Access Link	**https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/cultural-engagement-and-incident-depression-in-older-adults-evidence-from-the-english-longitudinal-study-of-ageing/F25**
Author email	**d.fancourt@ucl.ac.uk**

By **Culture.Case** | | **Health and wellbeing impacts of arts and culture** |

King's Culture
© Copyright 2026
Designed, developed and maintained by **King's Digital Lab**
Originally built by **weheartdigital Ltd**
Accessibility Statement