

## Eli's Rehab Report

### Clinical Rehab Roundup: Improve Patients' Self-Control Now To Boost Outcomes Later

**Impulsive children are more likely to suffer health consequences later -- unless you intervene.**

A Gradient of Childhood Self-Control Predicts Health, Wealth, and Public Safety. Moffitt TE, Arseneault L, Belsky D, Dickson N, Hancox RJ, Harrington HL, Houts R, Poulton R, Roberts B, Ross S, Sears M, Thomson WM, and Caspi A. Proc Natl Acad Sci. 2011 Jan. Occupational therapists working with children and young adults who exhibit impulsive or inattentive behavior take note: A new long-term study has linked this type of early low self-control with devastating consequences in adulthood. But you can make a difference.

In a study of more than 1,000 children in New Zealand, researchers found that children who lacked persistence in meeting their goals or were over-active, impatient, or otherwise restless scored highest for breathing problems, sexually transmitted diseases, high blood pressure, financial strain, and incarceration as adults.

The study, published in the January 24 early edition of Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, imply that "innovative policies that put self-control center stage might reduce a panoply of costs that now heavily burden citizens and governments."

Surprise: Participants who started out with low self-control but who found ways to improve their self-control over time fared better in adulthood than predicted, noted **Terrie Moffitt** and **Avshalom Caspi**, the **Duke University** psychologists who led the international research team.

That means early intervention focused on improving or enhancing a child's self-control can drastically impact their health and wealth in the future, the authors posit. And even slight changes in a young adult's self-control can lead to positive results. OTs are in a prime position to work with children on self-control and discipline, the study noted.

Do this: Practice decision-making, role-playing, and linking consequences with actions, the study offers. And improving self-control isn't just a job for OTs -- parents, teachers, physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, and other adults are also in a great position to help children practice self-control.

Not only will targeting discipline early on lead to increased health and decreased problems as children age, it can also be a huge cost savings. Individuals with high levels of self-control will need less help from social service agencies and likely avoid legal troubles -- all which lead to savings for taxpayers and governments.