

## Thinking About Death and Mortality

April 16-20, 2014

Death may be inevitable, but most Americans don't spend much time thinking about it. Just 14% of Americans say they spend a lot of time thinking about their own death, while another 31% say they spend some time thinking about it. Most Americans – 54% - say they don't spend much or any time thinking about their own death.

There is little difference by age, but there are differences by gender. Most women (51%) say they think about their own death at least some of the time; this is true of just 38% of men.

### How Much Do You Think About Your Own Death?

	Total	Men	Women
A lot	14%	11%	17%
Some	31	27	34
Not much/Not at all	54	60	49

In considering how they might die, most Americans think there is such a thing as a good death. 65% think this is true, while 27% don't think there is such a thing.

### Is There Such a Thing as a Good Death?

	Total	Men	Women
Yes	65%	64%	66%
No	27	26	28

Four in ten Americans say they currently have a will, but most (60%) do not- including 62% of Americans who say they think about their own death a lot of the time. As might be expected, age plays a role here. Just 22% of those under age 50 say they have a will but that rises to 62% among those who are 50 and older.

### Do You Have a Will?

	Total	Age 18-49	Age 50+
Yes	40%	22%	62%
No	60	78	37

Even though most Americans haven't made a will, most have made clear what kind of medical care they would want if they were too sick to express their wishes. 58% have shared such plans with their family members or next of kin, while 41% have not.

Age is a factor here as well: older Americans are far more likely to have made clear their medical wishes. 75% of Americans over 65 have done so, compared to just 41% of Americans under the age of 35.

**Have You Made Clear Your Wishes Medical Care  
in the Event You are Incapacitated?**

	Total	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Yes	58%	41%	55%	58%	73%	75%
No	41	58	44	41	27	24

The public is somewhat divided in what they prefer to happen to their body after they die: 48% want to be cremated, while 42% want to be buried. Americans who do not express a religious preference are far more likely to want to be cremated (67%) than those who identify with a particular religion (48%).

Also, more women favor cremation (51%) than men (44%).

**After You Die, Do you Prefer to Be...?**

	Total	Have religion	No religion	Men	Women
Cremated	48%	42%	67%	44%	51%
Buried	42	48	24	44	40

**The Afterlife**

Three in four Americans believe in the existence of heaven or hell – including 66% who think both exist and 11% who believe in only heaven. 17% of Americans don't think either place exists.

According to the poll, many Americans who don't believe in heaven or hell are agnostic, atheist, or do not identify with a particular religion. 49% of this group says neither place exists, but 43% of them do believe in heaven or hell.

**Do You Believe In...?**

	Total	Have religion	No religion
Both heaven & hell	66%	75%	36%
Heaven only	11	12	7
Neither	17	7	49

Among those who believe in heaven or hell, eight in 10 expect to be in heaven at the end of their life. 9% don't think they will be in either place, while just 2% say they'll wind up in hell after their death.

**Where Do You Think You Will Wind Up?**

(Among those who believe in Heaven/Hell)

Heaven	82%
Hell	2
Neither	9

**Death and Animals**

Even if money were no object, most Americans would not go so far as to bury their favorite pet in a cemetery after the die: just 35% would do so.

Younger Americans are more receptive to the idea than older Americans. Among those under the age of 35, the percentage that would bury their pet in a cemetery rises to 44%. In contrast,

just 28% of seniors 65 and older would bury their favorite pet in a cemetery if money were no object.

**Would You Bury Your Favorite Pet in a Cemetery?**

	Total	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
Yes	35%	44%	32%	32%	32%	28%
No	63	55	64	68	66	68

There isn't much enthusiasm among the American public for bringing extinct species back to life such as the woolly mammoth or the carrier pigeon. 63% say scientists should not bring back such species if they could, while just 29% would like them to return. Men are more likely than women to want scientists to bring back extinct species. Younger Americans are also more inclined to want to see extinct species come back to life, compared to those who are older.

**If They Could, Should Scientist Bring Back Extinct Species?**

	Total	Men	Women	Age 18-29	Age 30+
Yes	29%	39%	20%	41%	26%
No	63	52	72	54	65

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<sup>1</sup>This poll was conducted by telephone from April 16-20, 2014 among 1,017 adults nationwide. Data collection was conducted on behalf of CBS News by Social Science Research Solutions of Media, PA. Phone numbers were dialed from samples of both standard land-line and cell phones. The error due to sampling for results based on the entire sample could be plus or minus three percentage points. The error for subgroups may be higher. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. This poll release conforms to the Standards of Disclosure of the National Council on Public Polls.

CBS News Sunday Morning Pulse Poll  
 Thinking About Death and Mortality  
 April 16 – 20, 2014

SU-03. How much do you think about your own death – a lot, some, not much, or not at all?

	** TOTAL RESPONDENTS **		
	Total	Men	Women
	%	%	%
A lot	14	11	17
Some	31	27	34
Not much	30	32	29
Not at all	24	28	20
Don't know/No Answer	1	2	*

SU-04. Have you made clear to your family members or next of kin what kind of medical care you'd want if you were too sick to express your wishes, or haven't you done that?

	Total	***** Age *****				
	%	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Made clear	58	41	55	58	73	75
Haven't made clear	41	58	44	41	27	24
Don't know/No Answer	1	1	1	1	*	1

SU-05. Do you think there is such a thing as a good death, or not?

	Total	Men	Women
	%	%	%
Yes	65	64	66
No	27	26	28
Don't know/No Answer	8	10	6

SU-06. If money were no object, would you bury your favorite pet in a cemetery after they die, or not?

	Total	***** Age *****				
	%	18-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Yes	35	44	32	32	32	28
No	63	55	64	68	66	68
Don't know/No Answer	2	1	4	*	2	4

SU-07. Do you believe in heaven only, hell only, both or don't you think either exists?

	***** TOTAL RESPONDENTS *****				
	Total	Men	Women	**** Religious preference ****	
				Have Religion	No Religion
%	%	%	%	%	
Heaven only	11	10	12	12	7
Hell only	*	*	*	*	*
Both	66	62	69	75	36
Neither exists	17	21	13	7	49
Don't know/No Answer	6	6	5	5	8

SU-08. At the end of your life, where do you think you are mostly like to wind up – in heaven or in hell or neither one?

* AMERICANS WHO BELIEVE IN HEAVEN OR HELL *			
Heaven	82	76	86
Hell	2	2	2
Neither one	9	11	8
Don't know/No Answer	7	10	4

SU-09. After you die, would you prefer to be buried or cremated?

	***** TOTAL RESPONDENTS *****				
	Total	Men	Women	**** Religious preference ****	
				Have Religion	No Religion
%	%	%	%	%	
Cremated	48	44	51	42	67
Buried	42	44	40	48	24
Something else	1	1	1	1	1
Don't know/No Answer	9	11	7	9	8

SU-10. Do you have a will, or not?

	Total	Men	Women	*** Age ***	
				18-49	50+
				%	%
Yes	40	39	40	22	62
No	60	61	59	78	37
Don't know/No Answer	*	*	*	*	*

SU-11. If scientists could bring an extinct species back to life, such as the woolly mammoth or the carrier pigeon, do you think they should, or should not?

	Total	Men	Women	18-29	30+
				%	%
				%	%
Should	29	39	20	41	26
Should not	63	52	72	54	65
Depends	1	1	2	1	2
Don't know/No Answer	7	8	6	5	7