

Physical activity reduces heart disease deaths for older adults

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Being physically inactive—sitting for long periods of time—can be so harmful to your health that experts sometimes call it "sitting disease." In fact, worldwide, physical inactivity is estimated to cause some 3.2 million deaths a year.

Medical experts know that [regular physical activity](#) lessens [death](#) from all causes and death from [heart disease](#) specifically for middle-aged people. However, until now, little has been known about the benefits of exercise for older people when it comes to deaths associated with heart disease.

A new study, published in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*, examined whether regular leisure-time physical activity could reduce deaths from all causes, and whether it also could reduce deaths from cardiovascular disease.

To study this association, researchers examined information taken from 2,465 men and women aged 65 to 74 who participated in a national health study conducted between 1997 and 2007 in Finland.

The participants answered a questionnaire that assessed their lifestyle habits, including whether they smoked or engaged in exercise. Researchers also knew the participants' level of education, height and weight, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels.

The research team followed the participants through the end of 2013.

Then, they consulted the Finnish mortality register to determine how many of the participants had died (and what caused their deaths).

The researchers discovered that moderate- as well as high-levels of physical activity were associated with a decreased risk of heart disease and death from all causes, including from events such as strokes or heart attacks.

The researchers explained that physical activity works in several ways to improve your heart's health. Exercise helps people maintain a healthy body weight, lowers [blood pressure](#), reduces the risk of blood clots, helps stabilize [blood sugar levels](#), and improves the ratio of unhealthy to healthy cholesterol in your body.

If you are already moderately active, that is enough to make a positive impact on your health, said the researchers. If you're sedentary and become more active—even by taking several short walks around your home each day—you can improve your health significantly, and lower your risk of heart disease, the researchers said.

This summary is from "Leisure time [physical activity](#) reduces total and cardiovascular mortality as well as [cardiovascular disease](#) incidence among older adults." It appears online ahead of print in the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*. The study authors are Noël C. Barengo, PhD; Riitta Antikainen, PhD; Katja Borodulin, PhD; Kennet Harald, MSc; and Pekka Jousilahti, PhD.

More information: Noël C. Barengo et al, Leisure-Time Physical Activity Reduces Total and Cardiovascular Mortality and Cardiovascular Disease Incidence in Older Adults, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2016). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.14694](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.14694)

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