

Can Exercise Prevent Disability?

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(PhysOrg.com) -- A new study will test if exercise can prevent or delay the declining ability to walk in older adults.

Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine will be the Chicago site of a national trial funded by the National Institutes of Health. It is the largest randomized, controlled trial ever conducted on [physical activity](#) in older adults.

"The results will provide definitive evidence, for the first time, about whether exercise can prevent decline in walking ability in an older, frail population," said lead investigator Mary McDermott, M.D., professor of medicine at Feinberg and a physician at Northwestern Memorial Hospital. "The study is of utmost importance given the aging of the population and the fact that older men and women are living longer with chronic disease. Maintaining independence is one of our public health priorities for older adults."

Little is known about whether specific interventions can help prevent major mobility disability, defined as the inability to walk a quarter of a mile or four blocks. For older adults, staving off disability could help them maintain their physical independence and enhance the quality of their later years.

Called the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders, or LIFE study, the national trial will enroll 1,600 sedentary [older adults](#) between the ages of 70 and 89 who are at risk of mobility disability.

Northwestern, one of eight institutions around the country conducting

the trial, will enroll 200.

The LIFE study will compare the long-term effectiveness and practicality of two interventions: a physical activity program and a successful aging health education program.

Eligible participants will be randomly assigned to take part in either a structured physical activity program that includes moderate-intensity physical activity such as walking and exercises to improve strength, balance and flexibility, or in a successful aging program that includes health education workshops and supervised stretching. Individuals will be followed for up to approximately four years. The overall trial will run for six years.

In addition to disability prevention, investigators will examine whether physical activity and health education affect cognitive function, cardiovascular and cardiopulmonary events, serious fall injuries and disability in basic activities of life. They also will look at quality-of-life measures such as depression symptoms, sleep quality, stress and satisfaction with life, and will assess the cost-effectiveness of these programs for older people.

Provided by Northwestern University

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