

Physical activity reduces risk of serious falls in older men

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Older men who engage in regular physical activity experience far fewer serious fall injuries than those who do not, say Yale researchers. Their findings suggest that moderate exercise can help prevent potentially devastating falls, the leading cause of injury in people age 70 and older.

The study results, published online Feb. 3 in *The BMJ*, are drawn from the Lifestyle Interventions and Independence for Elders (LIFE) Study, the largest and longest trial of [physical activity](#) in older people.

Nearly one-third of older people experience falls, and 10% of those who fall suffer a serious injury. While exercise can help reduce falls, there has been insufficient data to show that physical activity prevents fall injuries. The LIFE Study, conducted in eight research centers in the United States including Yale, evaluated the benefits of physical activity for [older people](#). It compared the impact of a long-term, [moderate exercise](#) program versus health education on 1,635 sedentary persons aged 70-89.

The researchers found that while physical activity did not significantly reduce the risk of a serious fall injury, relative to health education, there were notable gender differences. The likelihood of a serious fall injury was reduced 38% in men but not reduced in women. Men in the physical activity group also saw a 53% reduced rate of fall-related fractures, and a 59% reduced rate of fall injuries leading to hospitalization.

"The physical activity program was more effective in reducing the rate of serious fall injuries in men than in women," said Thomas M. Gill, M.D., professor of geriatrics. The physical activity program included moderate walking, and flexibility, strength, and balance training exercises.

The research team noted that the male study participants had increased their physical activity to

a greater extent than the women. Men in the study also had greater improvements in their gait, balance, and muscle strength in response to the physical activity program.

While mixed, the results suggest that moderate exercise may be the prescription for preventing life-changing falls in [older men](#), note the researchers.

"The results from the current study support continued evaluation of the physical activity program for possible widespread implementation in the community," Gill said.

More information: The *BMJ*, www.bmj.com/cgi/doi/10.1136/bmj.i245

Provided by Yale University

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