

# Do differences in gait predict the risk of developing depression in later life?

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Older people who were newly diagnosed with depression had a slower walking speed and a shorter step length compared with those without depression in a recent *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* study.

Gait parameters and [mental health](#) both have significant impacts on functional status in later life. The study's findings suggest that gait problems may represent a potentially modifiable risk factor for depression.

"Depression in later life is difficult to diagnose and [older people](#) are much less likely to present to a healthcare professional with mood-related symptoms. These findings are important because it is crucial to identify [older individuals](#) at higher risk of developing depression in order to promote earlier intervention," said lead author Dr. Robert Briggs, of St. James's Hospital, in Ireland. "This study also raises the possibility that exercise programmes aimed at improving walking speed and balance may help in prevention of depression in later life, though this would need to be tested in dedicated clinical studies."

**More information:** Robert Briggs et al, Do Differences in Spatiotemporal Gait Parameters Predict the Risk of Developing Depression in Later Life?, *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/jgs.15783](https://doi.org/10.1111/jgs.15783)

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