

Study reveals the multiple benefits of physical exercise for people with lupus

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A group of researchers, including personnel from the University of Granada (UGR), has recently presented the results of a study into patients with systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), a systemic autoimmune disease that carries a high cardiovascular risk. The conclusions show the importance of maintaining cardiorespiratory fitness or aerobic capacity, with physical exercise being the best mode.

The project, which began in 2017, is called "Effects of a Physical Exercise Program on Subclinical Arteriosclerosis and Inflammation in Patients with Systemic Lupus Erythematosus" (EXERCITALS). It aimed to investigate the effects of a 12-week program of progressive, individualized, and specially adapted aerobic training on arterial stiffness and inflammation in women with this type of lupus. The effects of exercise on [physical fitness](#) and variables such as fatigue, depression, or [quality of life](#)—all of which are usually affected in these patients—were also evaluated.

Results and next steps

The main results of the project, published in the *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, indicate that the patients who took part in the exercise program substantially increased their aerobic capacity compared to another group that was only given information about healthy lifestyle choices. Arterial stiffness and inflammation were not adversely affected, hence such a program would constitute a safe intervention that does not negatively affect these cardiovascular risk factors.

Another publication, *Disability and Rehabilitation*, indicates that taking part in this training program significantly reduced fatigue levels among participants, even though depressive symptoms, stress, sleep quality, or quality of life did not change substantially compared to the group that did no training. Furthermore, the increase in [aerobic capacity](#) post-exercise was found to be partially responsible for the reduction in general fatigue observed after the intervention.

Blanca Gavilán Carrera notes that previous studies related to this project also demonstrated that "although age is the main factor that causes the arteries to become hardened and increases the risk of arteriosclerosis, higher levels of cardiorespiratory [fitness](#) are associated with a lower annual increase in arterial stiffness."

"Overall, the results of this project underline how important it is for people with systemic autoimmune diseases, such as LES, to maintain [cardiorespiratory fitness](#), and that exercise is the only tool able to achieve this—or even improve fitness levels," explains Gavilán Carrera.

In the next year or two, a follow-up study will be conducted on the patients who have participated. This will provide a better understanding of the role of physical activity and fitness as health markers in this population.

More information: Blanca Gavilán-Carrera et al.

Effects of 12-week aerobic exercise on patient-reported outcomes in women with systemic lupus erythematosus, *Disability and Rehabilitation* (2020).
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