

The secret to fewer doctor office visits after 70—play high school sports

December 30 2013

Seventy year olds who don't frequently visit the doctor have something unexpected in common – most played high school sports. They were active on a team over 50 years ago and are more likely to be active into their late 70s.

The new study, titled "Fit in 50 Years," was published in *BMC Public Health* looked at what factors of behavior, background, and personality impact the healthfulness of men over 70. The study was conducted by researchers Brian Wansink PhD of Cornell University's Food and Brand Lab and Simone Dohle PhD of the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich.

The study tracked 712 World War II veterans who were healthy as young men – they had passed a rigorous physical exam when being screened for the military—and surveyed them 50 years later at average of 78 years. The most surprising result was that those who had played a high school sport in the 1930s or early 1940s, reported visiting their doctor fewer times a year.

Also, the best predictor of whether a healthy young man would regularly exercise 50 years later was simply whether he had played a team or individual sport in high school. Many of those who played a [high school](#) sport were still active compared to those who didn't.

Decreased physical activity among youth is a rising concern in the US. Inactive children are more likely to be obese and suffer from mental and

physical health problems. One way to further assess the importance of physical activity in children and adolescents is to look at the long-term impacts of [physical activity](#) on overall health and wellbeing, as this study did. The results emphasize the necessity of encouraging youths to regularly engage in athletic programs and other exercise activities such as swimming or dance. Physical activity programs are often hurt by budget cuts, leaving children with fewer or no opportunities to be active on a regular basis. This study provides evidence that can be used to inform schools, youth centers, and program funders about the long-term, hugely positive impact of providing opportunities for children and adolescents to engage in physical activities.

Provided by Cornell Food & Brand Lab

Citation: The secret to fewer doctor office visits after 70—play high school sports (2013, December 30) retrieved 1 March 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-12-secret-doctor-office-70play-high.html>

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