

Exercise is the best medicine: QUT study

July 11 2014, by Sandra Hutchinson

Women would benefit from being prescribed exercise as medicine, according to a QUT study that revealed moderate to high intensity activity is essential to reducing the risk of death in older women.

Professor Debra Anderson, from QUT's Institute of Health and Biomedical Innovation, said that in addition to conventional treatments for physical and mental health, health professionals should be prescribing tailored [exercise](#) programs for [older women](#).

Professor Anderson and QUT's Dr Charlotte Seib co-authored a paper published in the international journal of midlife health and beyond, *Maturitas*, which pulls together five years of research looking into the impact of exercise on mental and physical health in women over the age of 50.

"Studies clearly show moderate to vigorous intensity activity can have mental and physical health benefits, particularly when part of broader positive health changes," Professor Anderson said.

"When once we thought that 30 minutes of mild exercise a day was enough to improve health, research is now telling us that older women should be doing at least 30-45 minutes five times a week of moderate to high [intensity exercise](#) and by that we mean exercise that leaves you huffing and puffing.

"It's also important that the exercise be tailored to ensure that it is high intensity enough to obtain the positive sustained effects of exercise."

Professor Anderson said studies had shown that high intensity exercise over a sedentary lifestyle significantly reduced the risk of death.

"Older adults who undertake regular physical activity also report significantly less disability, better physical function and that is regardless of their body mass," she said.

"The most active women are more likely to survive than the least physically active women.

"We have an ageing population and as a result promoting healthy ageing has become an important strategy for reducing morbidity and mortality."

Professor Anderson said research also linked exercise to improvements in mental well-being.

"What we are saying is that high-intensity exercise is not only good for your physical health but also your brain health," she said.

Professor Anderson, who works closely with older women through specialised women's wellness programs, said older women were capable of undertaking a range of activities beyond simply walking.

"Our studies show that mid-to-later in life women are jogging, running, hiking, swimming and riding," she said.

"Doctors should be developing [exercise programs](#) that are home-based and easy to incorporate as part of everyday activities."

More information: Debra Anderson, Charlotte Seib, Laura Rasmussen, "Can physical activity prevent physical and cognitive decline in postmenopausal women?: A systematic review of the literature," *Maturitas*, Available online 20 June 2014, ISSN 0378-5122, [DOI](#):

[10.1016/j.maturitas.2014.06.010](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2014.06.010).

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