

For older adults, more physical activity could mean longer, healthier lives

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Two studies demonstrate that older adults may be able to live longer, healthier lives by increasing physical activity that doesn't have to be strenuous to be effective, according to preliminary research presented at the American Heart Association's Epidemiology and Prevention | Lifestyle and Cardiometabolic Health Scientific Sessions 2020.

"Finding a way to physically move more in an activity that suits your capabilities and is pleasurable is extremely important for all people, and especially for older people who may have risk factors for cardiovascular diseases. Physical activities such as brisk walking can help manage [high blood pressure](#) and high cholesterol, improve glucose control among many benefits," said Barry A. Franklin, Ph.D., past chair of both the American Heart Association's Council on Physical Activity and Metabolism and the National Advocacy Committee, director of preventive cardiology and cardiac rehabilitation at Beaumont Health in Royal Oak, Michigan and professor of internal medicine at Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine in Rochester, Michigan.

Higher levels of light physical activity are associated with lower risk of death from any cause (Abstract 31)

Older adults were 67% less likely to die of any cause if they spent at least 150 minutes per week in moderate to vigorous physical activity—a goal recommended by the American Heart Association—compared to those who did not engage in more than 150 minutes per week of moderate to vigorous physical activity.

However, this investigation observed that, among the participants with an average age of 69, physical activity doesn't have to be strenuous to be effective. The researchers observed that each 30-minute interval of light-intensity [physical activities](#)—such as doing household chores or casual walking—was associated with a 20% lower risk of dying from any cause. Conversely, every additional 30-minutes of being sedentary was related to a 32% higher risk of dying from any cause.

"Promoting light-intensity physical activity and reducing sedentary time may be a more practical alternative among [older adults](#)," said Joowon Lee, Ph.D., a researcher at Boston University in Boston.

This investigation evaluated physical activity levels of 1,262 participants from the ongoing Framingham Offspring Study. Participants were an average age of 69 (54% women), and they were instructed to wear a device that objectively measured physical activity for at least 10 hours a day, for at least four days a week between 2011 and 2014.

The strengths of this investigation include its large sample size and the use of a wearable device to objectively measure physical activity. However, the participants of the Framingham Offspring Study are white, so it is unclear if these findings would be consistent for other racial groups.

Co-authors of the study are Nicole L. Spartano, Ph.D.; Ramachandran S. Vasan, M.D. and Vanessa Xanthakis Ph.D. Author disclosures are in the abstract.

Every step counts in reducing cardiovascular disease deaths among older women (Abstract 30)

Women who walked 2,100 to 4,500 steps daily reduced their risk of dying from [heart](#) attacks, heart failure, stroke and other cardiovascular diseases by up to 38%, compared to women who walked less than 2,100 daily steps. The women who walked more than 4,500 steps per day reduced their risk by 48%, in this study of over 6,000 women with an average age of 79. 2

The cardio-protective effect of more steps per day was present even after the researchers took into consideration heart disease [risk factors](#), such as obesity, elevated cholesterol, blood pressure, triglycerides and/or blood sugar levels, and was not dependent on how fast the women walked.4

"Despite popular beliefs, there is little evidence that people need to aim

for 10,000 steps daily to get cardiovascular benefits from walking. Our study showed that getting just over 4,500 steps per day is strongly associated with reduced risk of dying from cardiovascular disease in [older women](#)," said lead study author Andrea Z. LaCroix, Ph.D., distinguished professor and chief of epidemiology at the University of California, San Diego.

"Taking more steps per day, even just a few more, is achievable, and step counts are an easy-to-understand way to measure how much we are moving. There are many inexpensive wearable devices to choose from. Our research shows that older women reduce their risk of heart disease by moving more in their daily life, including light activity and taking more steps. Being up and about, instead of sitting, is good for your heart," said LaCroix.

The study included more than 6,000 women enrolled in the Women's Health Initiative with an average age of 79 who wore an accelerometer on their waist to measure physical activity for seven days in a row; participants were followed for up to seven years for heart disease death.

This study was prospective, and half of the participants were African American or Hispanic. The use of an accelerometer to measure movement is a strength of the study. The study did not include men or people younger than 60, so it will be important for future research to examine step counts and other measures of daily activity across the adult age range among both men and [women](#).

Provided by American Heart Association

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