Study finds a year after cardiac event only 37 percent still exercising

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Researchers from the Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing at Case Western Reserve University found that one year after 248 individuals completed a 12-week cardiac rehabilitation program following a heart attack, bypass surgery or angioplasty, only 37% exercised three times a week to keep their hearts healthy.

Women across the age groups were less inclined to make the healthy changes in comparison to men. Although all groups had a decline between months 9 and 12, younger men sustained healthy exercise patterns better than all the other groups.

"The study points out that interventions are needed to keep people exercising," said Mary Dolansky, assistant professor of nursing and the lead investigator on the study.

The research follows up on an assessment of individuals as they left a 12-week rehabilitation program to help cardiac patients make lifestyle changes in the area of exercise—a major factor in improving heart health.

The nursing school's Associate Dean for Research Shirley Moore, the Edward J. & Louise Mellen Professor of Nursing and a member of the current research team, led the original study.

Both studies are projects of the SMART (Self-Management Advancement through Research Translation Center, a National Institute

of Nursing Research/National Institute of Health funded Center of Excellence to build the Science of Self-Management). This NIH-funded study is part of a longitudinal look at how people manage their chronic illnesses.

The follow-up findings were reported in the article, "Women's and Men's Exercise Adherence After a Cardiac Event: Does Age Make a Difference?" for GeroNurseResearch.com.

Dolansky said the new research study examined gender differences in three age groups: 60 years and younger, 61 to 71 years, and older than 71. Exercise patterns were recorded through heart monitors worn by the participants.

It was found that across the age groups women exercised less than men.

"Many women traditionally put caretaking of their families before their health needs," she said.

The oldest group of men exercised less than younger men.

"The downward trend over time concerns us—especially since current guidelines suggest exercising five times a week," she said.

What might contribute to the decline in exercise over time for women is the initial optimistic outlook that exercise barriers, like care giving for family members, can be overcome, but in fact prevent them in time from continuing an exercise program.

"We need to understand why they stop exercising," she said.

Patients may need new interventions to realize this is a necessary lifelong change, Dolansky said.

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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