

## Pilot program helps boost seniors' activity levels, quality of life

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Older adults often carry a deeply ingrained belief that inactive, sedentary lives are an inevitable part of aging. But this mindset is not just wrong, it can be changed — with positive physical and mental health results.

In a new UCLA study, researchers show that older adults who participated in a pilot test for a program aimed at changing this mindset became more physically active, increasing their walking levels by about 24 percent — an average increase of 2.5 miles per week. The study is available on the Web site of the *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*.

"We can teach older adults to get rid of those old beliefs that becoming sedentary is just a normal part of growing older," said Dr. Catherine Sarkisian, assistant professor of geriatrics at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA and the study's lead author. "We can teach them that they can and should remain physically active at all ages."

The researchers used a technique known as "attribution retraining" to effect a change among study participants about what it means to age and what to expect out of it.

"The exciting part is that, to our knowledge, this attribution retraining component hasn't been tested in a physical activity intervention," Sarkisian said. "It's been very successful in educational interventions."

The researchers worked with 46 sedentary adults age 65 and older from

three senior centers in the Los Angeles area. The participants attended four weekly, hour-long group sessions led by a trained health educator who applied an attribution retraining curriculum. The participants were taught to reject the notion that becoming older means becoming sedentary and to accept that they can continue engaging in physical activity well into old age. Each attribution retraining session was followed by a one-hour exercise class that included strength, endurance and flexibility training.

Participants were fitted with electronic pedometers, to be worn at all times, which measured the number of steps they took each week. They also completed surveys that gauged their expectations about aging — higher scores indicated that participants expected high functioning with aging, while lower scores meant they expected physical and mental decline.

As a result of the program, participants increased the number of steps they took per week from a mean of 24,749 to 30,707 — a 24 percent increase — and their scores on the age-expectation survey rose by 30 percent. Also, their mental health-related quality of life improved, and they reported fewer difficulties with daily activities, experienced less pain, had higher energy levels and slept better.

"An intervention combining attribution retraining with a weekly exercise class raised walking levels and improved quality of life in sedentary older adults in this small pre-post community-based pilot study," the researchers wrote. "Attribution retraining deserves further investigation as a potential means of increasing physical activity in sedentary older adults."

Source: University of California - Los Angeles

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