

## 'Use it or lose it'

November 28 2007

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Researchers from the Peninsula Medical School in Exeter, UK, have concluded a study that proves a direct link between levels of physical activity in middle age and physical ability later in life – regardless of body weight.

Dr. Iain Lang headed the research team from the Epidemiology and Public Health Group at the Peninsula Medical School. The team found that middle-aged people who maintained a reasonable level of physical activity were less likely to become unable to walk distances, climb stairs, maintain their sense of balance, stand from a seated position with their arms folded, or sustain their hand grip as they get older.

Research showed that, among men and women aged 50 to 69 years and across all weight ranges, the rate of decreased physical ability later in life was twice as high among those who were less physically active.

The research team studied 8,702 participants in the US Health and Retirement Study and 1,507 people taking part in the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing. Each subject was followed for up to six years.

Findings showed that being overweight or obese was associated with an overall increased risk of physical impairment but that, regardless of weight, people who engaged in heavy housework or gardening, who played sport or who had a physically active job, were more likely to remain mobile later in life.

Physical activity of about 30 minutes three or more times a week resulted in fewer than 13 per cent of people developing some sort of physical disability, while this rate increased to 24 per cent where subjects were less active.

Dr. Lang commented: “There are three truly interesting results from this research. The first is that our findings were similar from the US and the UK, which suggests that they are universal. The second is that exercise in middle age does not just benefit people in terms of weight loss – it also helps them to remain physically healthy and active later in life. The third is that, in terms of results from activity, weight does not seem to be an issue.”

Source: The Peninsula College of Medicine and Dentistry

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