

# Perception of health and balance has direct impact on walking activity, new study says

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New research out of the University of Pittsburgh indicates that patients' perceptions of their own health and balance have an impact on how much they walk. The study was originally published in *Physical Therapy* (December 2008), the scientific journal of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA).

"The purpose of this cross-sectional study was to investigate the simultaneous impact of psychological factors--health perception and balance perception--and physiological factors--gait speed, fall history and balance performance--on walking activity in older adults," said the study's lead researcher and APTA spokesperson, Jaime B Talkowski, PT, PhD, a Research Associate and Instructor at the University at the time of this study. "What was surprising to us was learning that health and balance perception were significantly related to walking activity -- more so than fall history or balance performance."

Participants who perceived their overall health and balance to be good (63%) walked more blocks per week than those who thought one factor was good and the other was poor (26%). Those participants who perceived both their overall health and balance to be poor (11%) walked even less. Participants who walked a normal speed walked more blocks per week than those who walked at a slow speed.

The study followed 2,269 older adults (age 65+) with a median age of 79.2 years. "This study is significant because it clearly demonstrates how perception of health and balance can influence how often older adults

exercise," observed Talkowski. "It is important for physical therapists to ask questions relating to health and balance perception, as well as health history, during their examination. The more we know about patients' perception of their health and balance, the better we can address their issues."

Source: American Physical Therapy Association

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