

Fear of moving outdoors may shackle an older person home

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Fear may create walking difficulties in a short period of time. Fear of moving outdoors is very common among older people and increases the risk of developing self-reported difficulties in walking.

The research carried out at the Finnish Centre for Interdisciplinary Gerontology at the University of Jyväskylä shows that [fear](#) of moving outdoors increases the risk developing difficulties in walking among physically fit older people living at home. The effect of fear causing walking difficulties could be observed very soon, even during the first six months of observation.

The fear of moving outdoors is increased by various negative environmental features, such as poor condition of streets, hilly terrain around home and traffic noise. Individual features play a role as well: poor socioeconomic status, musculoskeletal diseases, and slow walking speed predispose older people to the fear of moving outdoors.

In older people, loss of the ability to move outdoors may threaten independent living in the community and participation in social and physical activities. Outdoor physical activity, particularly walking, plays a key role in the maintenance of functional independence in old age. Fear also restricts the outdoor activity of those [older people](#) who would otherwise be physically fit to move independently.

- People afraid of moving outdoors should be recognized early, and suitable support activities should be created for them, thus preventing

further disabilities, suggests researcher Merja Rantakokko.

Fear may be the first sign of future disability problems. On the other hand restricted outdoor movement caused by fear and decrease in activity may be partially responsible for the development of [walking](#) difficulties.

727 people between ages 75 to 81 years living in the Jyväskylä region participated in the preliminary interviews of the Screening and Counseling for Physical Activity and Mobility project, which is a joint project of the Finnish Centre for Interdisciplinary [Gerontology](#) and the City of Jyväskylä. 314 people participated in the 3,5 year observational study in which telephone interviews on mobility were conducted three times at 6-month intervals.

Source: University of Jyvaeskylae

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