

# Physical activity improves life expectancy and decreases need of care among older people

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A longitudinal research study conducted at the Finnish Centre for Interdisciplinary Gerontology at the University of Jyväskylä shows that people who have been regularly physically active since middle age and have lived long, needed less hospital and institutional care during their last year of life than those people who have been only occasionally or not at all physically active.

- Many older people hope to live long, to stay healthy and to be able to function until the end of their lives. However, as they get older the need of care and assistance increases. This is partly due to the fact that disability increases with age, and makes it substantially more difficult to manage living at home and especially increases the need for long-term care, says researcher Mikaela von Bonsdorff.

Earlier longitudinal studies have shown that [physical activity](#) decreases disability. However, there is no previous research on whether physical activity from midlife onward is associated with hospital and institutional care.

- Exercising has lately increased among middle aged and older [people](#), which in the future might have a positive effect on the health of the population and on the need of care, von Bonsdorff predicts.

The 16-year longitudinal study of the Evergreen project conducted at the

Finnish Centre for Interdisciplinary Gerontology at the University of Jyväskylä offered a unique possibility to examine the hospital and institutional care in the last year of life of decedent population of 846 persons. The participants were interviewed when they were 65-84 years old. Mortality and need of care were then followed on register-based data.

More information: von Bonsdorff MB, Rantanen T, Leinonen R, Kujala UM, Törmäkangas T, Mänty M, Heikkinen E. 2009. Physical activity history and end-of-life hospital and long-term care. *Journal of Gerontology: Medical Sciences*, Apr 6. [Epub ahead of print].

Source: University of Jyvaeskylae

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