

## People who work after retiring enjoy better health, according to national study

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Retirees who transition from full-time work into a temporary or part-time job experience fewer major diseases and are able to function better day-to-day than people who stop working altogether, according to a national study. And the findings were significant even after controlling for people's physical and mental health before retirement.

The study's authors refer to this transition between career and complete retirement as "bridge employment," which can be a part-time job, self-employment or a temporary job. The findings are reported in the October issue of the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, published by the American Psychological Association.

"Given the economic recession, we will probably see more people considering post-retirement employment," said co-author Mo Wang, PhD, of the University of Maryland. "These findings highlight bridge employment's potential benefits."

For this study, Wang and his fellow researchers looked at the national Health and Retirement Study, which is sponsored by the National Institute on Aging. They used data from 12,189 participants who were between the ages of 51 and 61 at the beginning of the study. The participants were interviewed every two years over a six-year period beginning in 1992 about their health, finances, employment history and work or retirement life.

In order to measure the respondents' health over the course of the study,

the researchers considered only physician-diagnosed health problems, such as [high blood pressure](#), diabetes, cancer, lung disease, heart disease, stroke and [psychiatric problems](#). They controlled not only for baseline physical and mental health but also for age, sex, [education level](#), and total financial wealth. The results showed the retirees who continued to work in a bridge job experienced fewer major diseases and fewer functional limitations than those who fully retired.

The participants answered a basic mental health questionnaire. The findings showed that people whose post-retirement jobs were related to their previous careers reported better mental health than those who fully retired. However, these mental health improvements were not found among people who worked in jobs outside their career field post-retirement. The authors say this may be because retirees who take jobs not related to their career field may need to adapt to a different work environment or job conditions and, therefore, become more stressed. Also, Wang has found retirees with financial problems are more likely to work in a different field after they officially retire.

"Rather than wanting to work in a different field, they may have to work," said Wang. "In such situations, it's difficult for retirees to enjoy the benefits that come with bridge employment." The authors suggest that, when possible, retirees carefully consider their choice of post-retirement employment.

"Choosing a suitable type of bridge employment will help retirees transition better into full [retirement](#) and in good physical and mental health," said co-author Kenneth Shultz, PhD, adding that employers who are concerned about a labor shortage due to numerous baby boomers retiring might consider bridge employment options for their retirees.

**More information:** "Bridge Employment and Retirees' Health: A Longitudinal Investigation," Yujie Zhan, MS, Mo Wang, PhD, and

Songqi Liu, MS, University of Maryland; Kenneth S. Shultz, PhD, California State University, San Bernardino; *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 14, No. 4.

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