

Retirement reduces tiredness and depression

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Retirement leads to a substantial reduction in mental and physical fatigue and depressive symptoms, finds a study published in the British Medical Journal today. However, the research also concludes that retirement does not change the risk of major chronic illnesses such as respiratory disease, diabetes and heart disease.

The authors, led by Dr Hugo Westerlund from Stockholm University, say their research findings have important implications given that people will be working for longer and retiring later in life.

[Retirement](#) is a major life transition, says the study. But the results of various studies investigating the [health effects](#) of retirement have been inconsistent with some suggesting a beneficial effect and others concluding the reverse.

This large scale population based study is ground-breaking as it observes participants for a long period of time (15 years) and for 7 years prior to retirement and 7 years post retirement. The research is based on almost 190,000 observation years.

The participants were drawn from a large French [cohort study](#) and included 11,246 men and 2,858 women who were surveyed annually from 1989 to 2007. The researchers argue that "a major strength of this study is that it is based on repeated yearly measurements over an extended time period."

Most participants were married (89%) and belonged to higher or middle

employment grades. They all retired on a statutory basis - 72% between the ages of 53 and 57 inclusive - and all participants had retired by the age of 64. In the year before retirement, one in four (25%) participants had suffered from [depressive symptoms](#) and 728 (7%) were diagnosed with one or more of the following: respiratory disease, diabetes, [heart disease](#) or stroke.

Unmarried respondents and those in low employment grades had higher odds of physical (but not mental) fatigue.

The results show that retirement is linked with a substantial decrease in both mental and physical fatigue, with a smaller but significant decrease in depressive symptoms. However, the research also shows there is no association between retirement and chronic disease. As expected, say the authors, these diseases gradually increased with age.

The authors believe there are a number of explanations for the findings: "if work is tiring for many older workers, the decrease in fatigue could simply reflect removal of the source of the problem ... furthermore, retirement may allow people more time to engage in stimulating and restorative activities, such as physical exercise," they write.

They conclude that their research results "indicate that fatigue may be an underlying reason for early exit from the labour market and decreased productivity, and redesign of work, healthcare interventions or both may be necessary to enable a larger proportion of older people to work in full health."

In an accompanying editorial, Alex Burdorf, a professor in the determinants of public health in the Netherlands, says the study "is unique in that annual health measurements were carried out several years before and after retirement."

Burdorf believes further research is needed to corroborate the findings as they contradict other studies and says "it is too early to make definite claims about positive and negative benefits from retirement at a particular age." The author agrees, however, that efforts are needed to improve and adapt working conditions "to help elderly workers maintain good health."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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