

Maintaining mobility in older age

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A study by the New Dynamics of Ageing Programme, a joint initiative by Research Council's UK, examines the relationship between successful aging and mobility patterns. While maintaining mobility plays a significant part in healthy aging, a new study highlights a high degree of inactivity even among an "elite" sample of fit and healthy older people aged between 72 and 92 years.

"Mobility is hugely important in terms of older people being able to remain independent," explains Dr Lynn McInnes. "Reduced mobility can restrict a person's social life as well as limiting their access to shops, leisure and other activities. People fear not being able to look after themselves and being a burden on others. Often a cause of this dependence is a decline in mobility."

The study used innovative methods, such as location awareness technologies for mapping the mobility of the oldest-old members (75 years and over) of an existing 25-year longitudinal study of ageing.

The daily mobility activities of a fairly active group of people showed that 70 per cent of the day is spent sitting or lying, 22 per cent of the day standing and seven per cent of the day walking. The furthest distance travelled from their home is on average four miles, or approximately 23 miles in a single week, spread over five journeys per week. As much as 78 per cent of the day is spent indoors and 14 per cent of the day is spent on outdoor activities.

Evidence suggests that sitting most of the time is an important factor to

take into account when looking at patterns of behaviour. The daily life of a person includes a combination of active, non-active or brief activities. These patterns suggest that changes occur as people [age](#) and starting an activity may be harder later in the day.

Lead researcher Dr McInnes points out: "New methods are needed to examine how much activity an individual does throughout a day. Monitoring activity levels by using tracking devices will help to assess the mobility ability of [older people](#). Additionally, monitoring health and well-being can help identify individuals who may be at risk."

In addition these findings highlight the importance of providing effective transport networks and a good range of local services to meet older people's needs," Dr McInnes explains. "Being able to stay [mobile](#) is crucial to older people's wellbeing, as loss of mobility means the loss of so many other things from their lives such as the ability to go shopping, meet friends and pursue hobbies and interests."

This project has helped to establish a reliable mobility profile of the oldest-old members of society by determining where individuals go and how active they are in the process and shows there is a clear relationship between mobility, health and well-being. It is encouraging to know that old age is not necessarily a time of ill health, a decline in thought processes or becoming a burden. Participants in this study exemplified 'successful ageing'.

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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