

Exercise key to a longer, happier life

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(Medical Xpress)—Sustained physical activity can add years to life and substantially improve the quality of those years, according to the latest results of a long-term study into more than 12,000 elderly Western Australian men.

In a paper recently published in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*, researchers from The University of Western Australia found that 150 minutes of [vigorous physical activity](#) per week added two to three years to the lives of those men who remained physically active for the duration of the 13-year study.

Those who had regularly engaged in [physical activity](#) throughout the study also aged more successfully than their inactive counterparts. Successful ageing was defined as ageing free of depression, [memory loss](#) or functional incapacity, while physical activity was defined as 150 minutes or more per week of exertion that made people huff and puff.

"So not only were active people more likely than non-active people to survive, but those who were alive and active when we followed up had reached old age in good shape, without evidence of depression or of cognitive or functional problems," lead author Professor Osvaldo Almeida said.

"In other words they were able to move about and do their business without significant assistance - looking after their finances, looking after themselves, looking after their house etc, and they did not have any evidence of [mental illness](#)."

Professor Almeida, Winthrop Chair of Geriatric Psychiatry at UWA's School of Psychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences, said the study also showed it was never too late to take up regular exercise, with those men who were inactive at the beginning of the study but who took up [regular physical activity](#) during the follow-up period also reaping the benefits.

"Those who started off inactive but became more active as time went by benefited as well," he said. "Not as much as the ones who were active at the beginning and the end, but quite a bit more than those who were inactive throughout."

Meanwhile, men who were active at the start of the study but gave it up over the 10-13 year follow-up period all but lost the health benefits of physical activity.

"It's better to become active than to be active and stop," Professor Almeida said.

"The message is it's never too late to start physical activity, and by engaging in regular physical activity older people not only survive longer, but they ensure that the chance of them ageing successfully - without significant functional impairments - also increases.

"Not only do they add years to life, but they add quality to their years."

The study concluded that regular physical activity seemed to promote longevity and healthy ageing and should be encouraged when safe and feasible.

The Health in Men Study (HIMS) is a longitudinal study of 12,201 men aged 65-83 when recruited in 1996. The HIMS research team, largely made up of UWA researchers, has so far published more than 100 papers on a wide range of [men's](#) health and ageing issues.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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