

# Moderate exercising encourages a healthier lifestyle

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The obesity epidemic has massive socio-economic consequences, and decades of health campaigns have not made significant headway. Researchers at the University of Copenhagen are therefore pursuing the development of new, interdisciplinary methods for preventing and treating this widespread problem.

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"Obesity is a complex social problem requiring a [multidisciplinary approach](#). In a new [scientific article](#) we combine data from biomedical

studies of the subjects' bodies with ethnological data on their experiences during the 13-week trial period. This enables us to explain the background for the surprising fact that 30 minutes of daily exercise is just as beneficial as a full hour of hard fitness training. The 'lightweight' group of exercisers appear to get more energy and be more motivated in relation to pursuing a [healthy lifestyle](#)," says Professor Bente Stallknecht from the Department of Biomedical Sciences at the Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Copenhagen.

A number of qualitative interviews with exercising subjects have been analysed by PhD student Anne Sofie Gram and have just been published in *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*.

## **Trials markedly impacting everyday life**

Last year, a research team monitored just over sixty moderately overweight—but healthy—Danish men for 13 weeks in their efforts to get in better shape. The men who exercised 30 minutes a day lost an average of 3.6 kg. during the three months, while weight loss was 2.7 kg. for those exercising for a full hour. By means of qualitative interviews based on ethnological expertise, the researchers have now approximated the [test subjects](#) by, e.g., identifying the cultural barriers in relation to training and change of entrenched habits.

"The qualitative data offer a possible explanation for the surprising biological data. The subjects in the test group that exercised the least talk about increased energy levels and a higher motivation for exercising and pursuing a healthy everyday life. They take the stairs, take the dog for an extra walk or cycle to work. In contrast, the men who exercised for one hour a day, after training, felt exhausted, demotivated and less open to making a healthy change. We are thus seeing that a moderate amount of exercise will significantly impact the subjects' daily practices," says Astrid Jespersen, ethnologist and associate professor at the Faculty of

Humanities.

## **Interdisciplinarity boosting motivation**

The fruitful cooperation is now generating additional joint research projects—among other things the Governing Obesity initiative which through interdisciplinary approaches aims to develop new methods for handling the [obesity epidemic](#)—both at individual and societal level.

"When addressing a complex problem such as obesity, several disciplines must be employed, and the research must be viewed from a holistic perspective. Decades of health campaigns have proven insufficiently effective because we have been unable to incorporate the significance of, e.g., psychology, culture and social structures," says Associate Professor Astrid Jespersen.

## **A long life**

The FINE project is an interdisciplinary collaboration among researchers from three faculties at the University of Copenhagen and two hospitals in Greater Copenhagen. In time, the knowledge gained by the project can prove significant for diagnostics and therapy in connection with preventing and treating lifestyle diseases and can lead to the development of better drugs.

**More information:** [sjp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../504505.full.pdf+html](http://sjp.sagepub.com/content/early/.../504505.full.pdf+html)

Provided by University of Copenhagen

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