

# Waiting for a donor heart: Motion prolongs survival

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For many people with advanced cardiac insufficiency, a heart transplant may be their only hope. e. But waiting for a donor heart to come along is a race against time. Patients who remains active and stay in good shape psychologically can significantly increase their chances of surviving this period. . Anxiety-ridden, depressive and passive patients, on the other hand, run the risk of further serious deterioration of their heart's ability to function.

This is what health psychologists at the universities of Luxembourg, Mainz and San Francisco found in a study conducted under the direction of Dr Heike Spaderna, University of Wuppertal, and Prof. Dr. Gerdi Weidner, San Francisco State University, in collaboration with the Eurotransplant International Foundation of Leiden.

About 15 million people in Europe and 5.7 million in the United States suffer from [cardiac insufficiency](#), with the trend on the way up and waiting lists for transplants getting longer. In the new study, published this month in the journal *Health Psychology*, the researchers examine data from more than 200 European outpatients on the waiting list. As it emerged, the physically active and non-depressive patients had considerably greater chances of surviving the waiting period, and that regardless of the seriousness of their illness.

"Out of fear of straining their ailing hearts, many patients hardly get any exercise, no longer take part in everyday activities or household chores and withdraw completely. The result is isolation, depression and further

deterioration of their physical condition, a veritable downward spiral," explains Prof Dr Claus Vögele, a health psychologist at the University of Luxembourg and one of the study's authors.

The scientists therefore recommend psychological counselling to help patients increase their everyday physical activity and reduce symptoms of depression to overcome their fears and remain active, thereby increasing their chances of survival until a [donor heart](#) is found.

**More information:** Spaderna, H., Vögele, C., Barten, M.J., Smits, J.M.A., Bunyamin, V. & Weidner, G. Physical activity and depression predict event-free survival in heart transplant candidates. Health Psychology, February 10 2014

Provided by University of Luxembourg

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