

Researchers look to success of parkrun to transform sedentary lifestyles

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A new study, funded by Cancer Research UK, from a researcher in our Department for Health will look at the popular appeal of parkrun in getting communities more active.

A new health project from the University will analyse the popular appeal of the parkrun initiative to understand more about how the citizen-led movement is getting people more active.

[parkrun](#) organise free, weekly, 5km timed runs, which are open to everyone, free, safe and easy to take part in. parkrun events began in the UK in 2004, but the initiative is now established around the world with nearly 800,000 parkrunners registered for regular weekly events.

As part of the new research, funded by Cancer Research UK, academics in our Department for Health have teamed up with researchers across Ireland, Scotland and England to explore the role of parkrun in offering individuals from different social backgrounds the opportunity to engage

in events and make lasting and meaningful lifestyle changes.

Scientists have shown that low levels of physical activity can increase the risk of certain cancers. A study published in December 2011 estimated that around 1 per cent of cancers in the UK, more than 3,000 cases every year, are linked to people doing less than government guidelines for [physical activity](#) each week.

In an era where [sedentary lifestyles](#) have become a norm, the researchers will work with parkrun community organisers to understand and measure the success of the initiative and learn lessons that could be applied to other sports.

Project lead, Professor Simone Fullagar, said: "We are excited to have been awarded new funding to explore in more detail than ever before why parkrun appeals to so many, and how its approach can help a cross-section of participants from diverse social backgrounds, as well as people who didn't previously identify as runners.

"We hear a lot about the dangers of sedentary lifestyles. We're interested in learning lessons from the success of parkrun to help create sport and active cultures that are about a sense of community and enjoyment that can support participation. In our society there is an overt focus on individual lifestyle change and we want to focus on what can be done to create opportunities for active living."

Dr Fiona Reddington, Cancer Research UK's Head of Clinical and Population Research, said: "We're delighted to be funding this ground-breaking new initiative, which we hope will uncover new ways of inspiring people to enjoy exercising as part of a healthy life. While more than 40 per cent of cancers could be prevented by people having healthier lifestyles, people's individual circumstances and beliefs mean changing everyday habits isn't always as easy as it seems. We want to see

people living longer healthier lives, so now is the time for research to unlock how best to help people stack the odds in their favour to minimise their cancer risk."

As part of the study, the research will focus on sites in Swindon, London, Aberdeen, Glasgow and Belfast.

Using surveys and in-depth interviews to identify individuals who participate in parkrun, this will focus on the benefits that individuals gain through participation, and also how the culture of parkrun helps attract participants, as well as the role of digital media.

It is hoped that the study can provide insights into better and more inclusive strategies that lead to a more joined-up approach between local sport, health promotion, community organisations and government sectors.

More information: The complete study is available online:
[www.cancerresearchuk.org/cance ... -cancer-the-evidence](http://www.cancerresearchuk.org/cance...-cancer-the-evidence)

Provided by University of Bath

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