

# Improving your fitness could improve your spouse's fitness

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Credit: Peter Griffin/Public Domain

Your exercise regimen isn't just good for you; it may also be good for your spouse.

New research led by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health finds that if one spouse improves his or her [exercise regimen](#), the other spouse is significantly more likely to follow suit.

The findings, being presented March 5 at the American Heart Association's EPI/Lifestyle 2015 Scientific Sessions in Baltimore, suggest that a better approach to helping people boost their physical activity to improve health might be to counsel married couples together instead of individually.

"When it comes to physical fitness, the best peer pressure to get moving could be coming from the person who sits across from you at the breakfast table," says Laura Cobb, a Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health doctoral student and co-author of the research. "There's an epidemic of people in this country who don't get enough exercise and we should harness the power of the couple to ensure people are getting a healthy amount of physical activity."

The researchers examined records from the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study, which in 1987 began following a group of 15,792 middle-aged adults from communities in Maryland, North Carolina, Minnesota and Mississippi. Cobb and her colleagues analyzed data from two medical visits conducted roughly six years apart, beginning between 1987 and 1989. At each visit, the researchers asked 3,261 spouse pairs about their [physical activity](#) levels.

The American Heart Association recommends that adults should exercise at a moderate intensity for a minimum of 150 minutes per week or at a vigorous intensity for at least 75 minutes per week. Forty-five percent of husbands and 33 percent of wives in the study group met these recommendations at the first visit.

They found that when a wife met recommended levels of exercise at the first visit, her husband was 70 percent more likely to meet those levels at subsequent visits than those whose wives were less physically active. When a husband met recommended [exercise levels](#), his wife was 40 percent more likely to meet the levels at follow-up visits.

"We all know how important exercise is to staying healthy," Cobb says. "This study tells us that one spouse could have a really positive impact on the other when it comes to staying fit and healthy for the long haul."

**More information:** "Physical Activity among Married Couples in the Atherosclerosis Risk in Communities (ARIC) Study" American Heart Association's EPI/Lifestyle 2015.

Provided by Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

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