

Housework keeps older adults more physically and emotionally fit, researcher finds

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Older adults who keep a clean and orderly home—because of the exercise it takes to get the job done—tend to feel emotionally and physically better after tackling house chores, according to new findings by a Case Western Reserve University school of nursing researcher.

"House cleaning kept them up and moving," said Kathy D. Wright, PhD, RN, CNS, a postdoctoral KL2 Scholar at the university's Frances Payne Bolton School of Nursing. "A [clean environment](#) is therapeutic."

Wright and a research team set out to test a theory called House's Conceptual Framework for Understanding Social Inequalities in Health and Aging. It's considered a blueprint for understanding how factors such as income, education, environment and [health behaviors](#), like smoking and exercise, influence an older person's health.

The study's 337 participants, from 65 to 94 years old, had to have at least one chronic illness, be enrolled in both Medicare and Medicaid, have physical restrictions that prevented them from doing at least one basic daily task, such as bathing and dressing, and be unable to manage such responsibilities as taking medicines, handling finances or accessing transportation. All lived in Ohio's Summit and Portage counties.

They discussed their backgrounds and physical and [emotional well-being](#) in interviews. The researchers then used the University of Utah's Digit

Lab, where Wright earned her doctorate degree while working for the Summa Health System, to link geographic and socioeconomic information on the neighborhoods with health data.

Wright said she was surprised to learn that housework and maintaining their property affected the participants' physical and mental well-being more than such factors as neighborhood or income.

"What I found was that neighborhood poverty did not directly affect mental or [physical health](#)," she said.

The study provided evidence that Wright had observed in her visits: people living in a chaotic environment seemed less satisfied than those in a place that was neat and tidy.

Wright hopes the study shows how important it is for sedentary [older adults](#) with disabilities and chronic illnesses to continue physical activities, such as doing reaching exercises while sitting, arm curls and standing up and sitting down in a chair.

Wright and her team's findings were reported in the recent *Geriatric Nursing* article, "Factors that Influence physical function and emotional well-being among Medicare-Medicaid enrollees."

Provided by Case Western Reserve University

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