

Out-of-home activities may promote older persons' physical activity

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Credit: Peter Griffin/public domain

It is beneficial to stimulate older people to leave home to increase their level of physical activity, suggests the study of postdoctoral researcher Erja Portegijs. The study, conducted at the Gerontology Research Center of the University of Jyväskylä, showed that older people were more physically active on the days when they left home and went further away.

Physical activity is important to maintain health and function in old age. Walking is the main form of [physical activity](#) for [older people](#). "As we expected, persons were more physically active on the days when they moved in a larger area compared to when they stayed at home or within their neighborhood," Portegijs says.

Persons are more likely to use a car when traveling over longer distances, for example outside their home town. "Yet, our study results show that persons traveling outside the town had less inactivity time than when they stayed within the neighborhood," Portegijs explains. This is important as recent studies have shown that increasing physical activity and reducing inactivity time both have major benefits for health.

People may leave home for various purposes. For example, visiting friends or shopping, even when using a car, may decrease inactivity time and possibly even increase physical activity. "Not all people are drawn to physical activity. Therefore, it may be a valuable approach to stimulate older people to go out of home in order to increase their total amount of physical activity," Portegijs speculates. "However, further interventional studies would be required to determine the health benefits of such an approach," she continues.

These are the results of a research project of 174 [older men](#) and women living independently in the Jyväskylä region in Central Finland. The test participants wore an accelerometer for 4–7 days and recorded daily in a diary where they had moved. The results were published online in an open access international scientific journal *PLOS ONE* on August 7, 2015.

More information: "Moving through Life-Space Areas and Objectively Measured Physical Activity of Older People." *PLOS ONE* August 7, 2015. [dx.plos.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0135308](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0135308)

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