

Study finds that retirement leads to positive lifestyle changes

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A landmark study led by University of Sydney has found that people become more active, sleep better and reduce their sitting time when they retire.

Published in the *Journal of Preventative Medicine*, the study followed the lifestyle behaviours of 25,000 older Australians including physical

activity, diet, sedentary behaviour, alcohol use and sleep patterns.

"Our research revealed that [retirement](#) was associated with positive lifestyle changes," said lead researcher Dr Melody Ding, Senior Research Fellow at the University's School of Public Health.

"Compared with people who were still working, retirees had increased physically activity levels, reduced sitting time, were less likely to smoke, and had healthier [sleep patterns](#).

"A major life change like retirement creates a great window of opportunity to make positive lifestyle changes - it's a chance to get rid of bad routines and engineer new, healthier behaviours." she said.

The data revealed that retirees:

- Increased [physical activity](#) by 93 minutes a week
- Decreased sedentary time by 67 minutes per day
- Increased sleep by 11 minutes per day
- 50 per cent of female smokers stopped smoking

The differences were significant even after adjusting for factors such as age, sex, urban/rural residence, marital status and education. There was no significant association found between retirement and alcohol use or fruit and vegetable consumption.

Dr Ding said retirement gave people more time to pursue healthier lifestyles.

"The lifestyle changes were most pronounced in people who retire after working full-time. When people are working and commuting, it eats a lot of time out of their day. When they retire, they have time to be physically active and sleep more," she said.

"In terms of [sedentary time](#), the largest reduction in [sitting time](#) occurred in people who lived in urban areas and had higher educational levels.

Dr Ding's mother's experience of retirement was a trigger for the study.

"My mother still lives in China and they have mandatory retirement for women at age 55. When she turned 55 she was really anxious about stopping work—she felt like she was not as valuable. So I thought I'd like to find some positive information about retirement."

"She now spends her days enjoying so many hobbies, she can't remember how she had time to work."

Retired bank manager Des (89 years) said: "I have more time in my retirement and I am happily busy. I keep fit by dancing four times a week and walking. I keep my mind active by involvement in the University of the Third Age, teaching computer skills and dancing to the oldies, most of them are younger than me.

"My answering machine message is 'I am out enjoying my retirement'," he said.

Dr Ding hopes the research will encourage people to think positively about retirement.

"We hope this information could translate to better health in older Australians, preventing cardiovascular disease and diabetes," she said.

"Retirement is a good [time](#) for doctors to talk their patients about making positive lifestyle changes that could add years to their life.

"The findings suggest that both health professionals and policy makers should consider developing special programs for retirees to capitalise on

the health transitions through retirement," Dr Ding said.

Provided by University of Sydney

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