

Moderate physical activity linked with 50 percent reduction in cardiovascular death in over-65s

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Moderate physical activity is associated with a greater than 50% reduction in cardiovascular death in over-65s, according to research presented at ESC Congress 2016 today. The 12 year study in nearly 2500 adults aged 65 to 74 years found that moderate physical activity reduced the risk of an acute cardiovascular event by more than 30%. High levels of physical activity led to greater risk reductions.

"The role of [physical activity](#) in preventing cardiovascular disease (CVD) in people of working age is well established," said Professor Riitta Antikainen, professor of geriatrics at the University of Oulu, Finland. "But relatively little is known about the effect of regular physical activity on CVD risk in older people."

The present study assessed the association between [leisure time](#) physical activity and CVD risk and mortality in 2456 men and women aged 65 to 74 years who were enrolled into the National FINRISK Study between 1997 and 2007.

Baseline data collection included self-administered questionnaires on physical activity and other health related behaviour, clinical measurements (blood pressure, weight and height), and laboratory measurements including serum cholesterol. Participants were followed up until the end of 2013. Deaths were recorded from the National Causes of Death Register and incident CVD events (coronary heart

disease and stroke) were collected from the National Hospital Discharge register.

The researchers classified self-reported physical activity as:

- Low: reading, watching TV or working in the household without much physical activity.
- Moderate: walking, cycling or practising other forms of light exercise (fishing, gardening, hunting) at least four hours per week.
- High: recreational sports (for example running, jogging, skiing, gymnastics, swimming, ball games or heavy gardening) or intense training or sports competitions at least three hours a week.

During a median follow-up of 11.8 years, 197 participants died from CVD and 416 had a first CVD event.

When the researchers assessed the link between physical activity and outcome they adjusted for other cardiovascular risk factors (blood pressure, smoking and cholesterol) and social factors (marital status and education). To minimise reverse causality, where worse health leads to less physical activity, patients with coronary heart disease, heart failure, cancer, or prior stroke at baseline were excluded from the analysis.

The investigators found that moderate and high leisure time physical activity were associated with a 31% and 45% reduced risk of an acute CVD event, respectively. Moderate and high leisure time physical activity were associated with a 54% and 66% reduction in CVD mortality.

Professor Antikainen said: "Our study provides further evidence that older adults who are physically active have a lower risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, and death from cardiovascular disease. The protective

effect of leisure time physical activity is dose dependent - in other words, the more you do, the better. Activity is protective even if you have other risk factors for cardiovascular disease such as high cholesterol."

She concluded: "Physical exercise may become more challenging with ageing. However, it is important for older people to still get enough safe physical activity to stay healthy after their transition to retirement."

More information: "Leisure time physical activity reduces the risk of cardiovascular death and an acute CVD event also among older adults" ESC Congress 2016.

Provided by European Society of Cardiology

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