

Being active saves lives whether a gym workout, walking to work or washing the floor

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

Physical activity of any kind can prevent heart disease and death, says a large international study involving more than 130,000 people from 17 countries published this week in *The Lancet*.

The Prospective Urban Rural Epidemiology (PURE) study, led by the

Population Health Research Institute of McMaster University and Hamilton Health Sciences, shows any activity is good for people to meet the current guideline of 30 minutes of activity a day, or 150 minutes a week to raise the [heart](#) rate.

Although previous research, from high income countries, shows leisure time activity helps prevent [heart disease](#) and death, the PURE study also includes people from low and middle-income countries where people don't generally don't participant in leisure-time physical activity.

"By including low and [middle-income countries](#) in this study, we were able to determine the benefit of activities such as active commuting, having an active job or even doing housework," said principal investigator Dr. Scott Lear. He added that one in four people worldwide do not meet the current activity guideline and that number is nearly three of four in Canada.

Lear holds the Pfizer/Heart & Stroke Foundation Chair in Cardiovascular Prevention Research at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver and is a professor of Simon Fraser University's Faculty of Health Sciences.

The PURE study showed that by meeting the activity guidelines, the risk for death from any cause was reduced by 28%, while heart disease was reduced by 20%, and it didn't matter what type of physical activity the person did. The benefits also continued at very high levels with no indication of a ceiling effect; people getting more than 750 minutes of brisk walking per week had a 36% reduction in risk of death. However, less than 3% of participants achieved this level from leisure time activity while 38% of participants achieved this level from activities such as commuting, being active at work or doing household chores.

Lear said that in order to realize the full benefits of physical activity, it

needs to be incorporated into daily life. "Going to the gym is great, but we only have so much time we can spend there. If we can walk to work, or at lunch time, that will help too."

"For low and middle income countries where having heart disease can cause a severe financial burden, [physical activity](#) represents a low-cost approach that can be done throughout the world with potential large impact," said Dr. Salim Yusuf, director of the Population Health Research Institute and the principal investigator of the overall PURE study.

"If everyone was active for at least 150 minutes per week, over seven years a total of 8% of deaths could be prevented," he added.

The PURE study was led by the Population Health Research Institute and conducted in over 70 sites in 17 countries. It is funded from more than 50 sources, including the Population Health Research Institute at McMaster University and Hamilton Health Sciences, the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Ontario SPOR Support Unit.

Provided by McMaster University

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