

# Access to water and diverse terrain encourage elderly toward physical activity

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Credit: University of Jyväskylä

A recently published study, conducted at the Gerontology Research Center of the University of Jyväskylä, found associations between features of natural environment in the home neighborhood and physical

activity of older people.

"Water fronts are favorable areas for outdoor mobility of older people experiencing walking difficulties. When a person's walking capability is good, versatile natural areas seem to attract older people to outdoor mobility," says MSc Kirsi Keskinen. The study will be part of her doctoral dissertation on associations between environmental features and outdoor mobility of older people.

The study results show that older people experiencing walking difficulties are more likely to be physically active when water areas are present and land use is more diverse in their neighborhood environment, compared to peers living in [neighborhoods](#) without such features. Older people without walking difficulties are more likely to be physically active when the habitat in natural areas is more versatile. Thus with declining walking capacity, environmental features that attract to outdoor mobility may change. "Overall, regardless of walking difficulties, participants living in a neighborhood with water areas and diverse terrain mostly perceive nature as a facilitator for outdoor mobility. Based on these results, it would be beneficial to take into consideration the outdoor mobility possibilities of elderlies when planning the environment," says Keskinen.

For this study 848 community-dwelling [older people](#) aged 75–90 years, who were living in the municipalities of Jyväskylä and Muurame in Central Finland, were interviewed. The participants were divided into two groups based on reported difficulties in walking 500 meters. The environmental [features](#) were defined within 500m and 1,000m distance from participants' homes using geographical information system.

**More information:** Kirsi E. Keskinen et al. Nature as a facilitator for physical activity: Defining relationships between the objective and perceived environment and physical activity among community-dwelling

older people, *Health & Place* (2018). DOI: [10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.12.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2017.12.003)

Provided by University of Jyväskylä

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