

Former elite athletes live longer than their brothers

January 17 2018

On average, former elite athletes survive longer than their brothers. In addition, their self-rated health and health-related habits are better in comparison to their brothers at an older age. This was clarified by Master of Health Sciences (Sports and Exercise Medicine) Titta Kontro from the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä. The study included in total 900 former elite athletes and their brothers.

Kontro investigated whether all-cause mortality and the development of behavioural and biological risk factors differ between athletes and their brothers in later life.

"Across all age groups, former [elite athletes](#) survived on average 2 to 3 years longer than their brothers, but at an old age there were no significant differences in all-cause mortality. Former endurance sports athletes lived longer than power sports athletes. Correspondingly, endurance sports athletes' brothers lived longer than power sports athletes' brothers," Kontro says.

Former elite athletes estimated to have better health, and they smoked less and were physically more active than their brothers. However, there were no significant differences in mobility, physical or psychosocial functioning in daily life between former athletes and their brothers. The brothers showed evidence of a lower mood than the former athletes.

These results support previous research findings regarding the role of

genetic or childhood family factors in determining high aerobic fitness and reduced mortality.

"Genetic differences between athletes and brothers, aerobic training for endurance elite sports and a healthier lifestyle may all contribute to reduced premature mortality. A healthier lifestyle is a key factor in preventing major chronic diseases and [premature mortality](#). These findings encourage both athletes and non-athletes to engage in sports at an [older age](#)," Kontro explains.

This research article is part of Titta Kontro's doctoral thesis, which continues a long-term project on mortality, morbidity and health habits of former elite athletes. The project is carried out in collaboration between the University of Jyväskylä and the University of Helsinki.

More information: Titta Katariina Kontro et al. Mortality and health-related habits in 900 Finnish former elite athletes and their brothers, *British Journal of Sports Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1136/bjsports-2017-098206](#)

Provided by University of Jyväskylä

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