

# Chronic diseases restrict the mobility of older people—often unconsciously

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Chronic diseases are a key factor limiting the mobility of older people. Usually, individuals are conscious of their condition, as in the case of an acute musculoskeletal disorder that causes pain or functional limitations. However, if the condition has progressed slowly, the gradual restriction of mobility often goes unnoticed.

"Healthcare professionals should pay attention to the mobility limitations caused by [chronic diseases](#) before older adults' independent living is endangered," says Professor Urho Kujala from the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences.

Participants in the MOBILETWIN study conducted at the University of Jyväskylä consisted of 779 twins between the ages of 71 and 75 years who were currently living at home. The study revealed that chronic diseases significantly decreased the measured amount of mobility without the research subjects noticing it. Typical diseases affecting the mobility of older adults included [coronary heart disease](#), heart failure, diabetes, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis.

A higher number of reported diseases resulted in a lower physical activity level. For individuals without diseases, the accrued number of steps per day was on average almost 7,000. In turn, those who reported at least three diseases moved less than 4,000 steps per day.

"The research subjects have been monitored since 1975. Being physically active in younger adulthood or early middle age did not affect the results," Professor Kujala says. "For those with or without diseases, there was no difference between the amounts of physical exercise in earlier life. Therefore, it is likely that the difference between healthy and ill individuals is caused by the diseases."

Exercise therapies tailored to the type of [disease](#) can significantly improve individuals' physical functioning, mobility and possibilities for independent living.

"It is important that also those with long-term illnesses are able to move, taking into account the safety issues related to the illness, of course," Kujala says. "More attention should be paid to the use of exercise therapy in healthcare. This benefits both [individuals](#) and society."

The research [participants](#) are a sub-group of the large Finnish Twin Cohort. The study included a telephone interview, questionnaires and a seven-day physical activity measurement in the home environment using a hip-worn accelerometer.

**More information:** Urho M. Kujala et al, Chronic diseases and objectively monitored physical activity profile among aged individuals – a cross-sectional twin cohort study, *Annals of Medicine* (2019). [DOI: 10.1080/07853890.2019.1566765](#)

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