

Sufficiently distant parks and public services facilitate older adults' physical activity

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Physical activity destinations more than 500 meters from home may encourage older people to engage in physical activity. Outdoor mobility facilitating parks, walking trails, and public services at greater distances

increased physical activity, according to a study conducted at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences of the University of Jyväskylä.

"Older people reporting attractive destinations more than 500 meters away were more physically active than those who did not report any [destination](#) or reported such destinations only closer to home," says senior researcher Erja Portegijs.

Physical activity is important for maintaining health and function in old age. A home neighborhood offering attractive destinations may thus help older people to maintain an active life. Research commonly assumes that only the near-[home environment](#) is meaningful for [older adults'](#) mobility and physical activity.

Nearly 200 men and women from Central Finland between the ages of 79 and 94 participated in this study. On an internet-based map, participants noted any outdoor mobility facilitating destinations they perceived.

With this new method, we obtained unique information about older adults' spatial mobility. Such a method has not been used in populations of this advanced age before.

Similar map-based data are increasingly used in city planning. However, older adults are typically underrepresented in such internet surveys.

"Research in representative samples of older populations is therefore important," Portegijs explains. "In our study, we provided technical assistance to enable the participation of those with limited IT skills as well."

Senior researcher Portegijs was also involved in a European-wide study among older adults of six European countries (Germany, Italy, the

Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom). The results show that it is useful to have multiple destinations such as public services, places to sit, and parks in the neighborhood. Reporting many of these types of destinations was associated with higher physical [activity](#).

"These results support the idea that diversity and quality aspects of neighborhood destinations are important to support older adults' [physical activity](#)," Portegijs says.

More information: Erja Portegijs et al. Older Adults' Physical Activity and the Relevance of Distances to Neighborhood Destinations and Barriers to Outdoor Mobility, *Frontiers in Public Health* (2020). [DOI: 10.3389/fpubh.2020.00335](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2020.00335)

Erja Portegijs et al. Neighborhood Resources Associated With Active Travel in Older Adults—A Cohort Study in Six European Countries, *Journal of Aging and Physical Activity* (2020). [DOI: 10.1123/japa.2019-0267](https://doi.org/10.1123/japa.2019-0267)

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