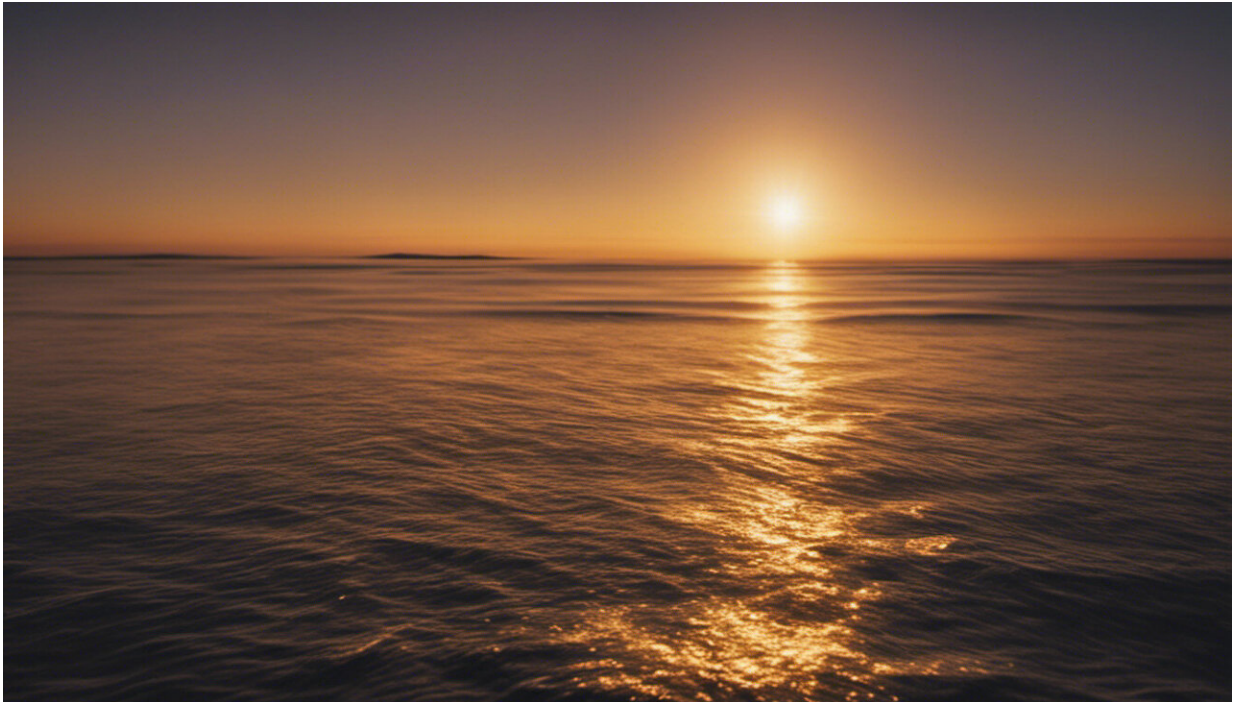


# Keeping the spark lit into the golden years

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Research confirms what a lot of folks have guessed: as we age, motivation wanes and getting off the couch and out the door becomes more challenging.

A new research article looks at the correlation between passion, grit and a positive [mindset](#) in people aged 14 to 77. This is the first study that addresses these links across such a broad age group.

The article suggests that passion and grit are strongly correlated early in life, especially in boys. Young people who are passionate about something are willing to go the distance to achieve it.

## **In young people, everything is connected to everything**

"Our passion controls the direction of the arrow, what we're fired up about and want to achieve. Grit drives our strength, how much effort we are willing to put in to achieve something," says Professor Hermundur Sigmundsson in NTNU's Department of Psychology.

This is exactly the correlation that researchers believe is extra important for a person to get really good at something. Truly passionate individuals are willing to work the hardest to become the best. And they persevere. Men, more than women, depend on passion for doing something, but otherwise the links between these qualities are pretty much the same between the sexes.

The connection between passion and a positive mindset enables you to believe that you will indeed get good at what you are passionate about. Encouragement and positive mindset show a similar pattern. Everything is connected to everything—at least while you're young.

But this correlation fades as we get older.

## **Less initiative in our 50s**

The survey includes 917 participants who were divided into several age groups.

"The correlations remain pretty similar from age 14 to 53," says Sigmundsson.

But as soon as you end up in your 50s, a shift happens. The connection between passion and grit becomes almost non-existent. In theory, it takes a lot more for us to actually do something.

So lazier people in their 50s can be full of [good intentions](#) and in theory be enthusiastic about doing something. But when it comes right down to it, should this be interpreted to mean that older people rarely stick with things unless they find something they're really interested in?

Sigmundsson confirms that yes, we could say that.

## **Something gets lost eventually**

People 50 years and up can be very passionate, but tend to have less grit. Or vice versa.

"What this means is that it's more difficult to mobilize our grit and willpower, even if we have the passion. Or we may have the grit and willpower but aren't quite as fired up about it," the professor says.

Positive mindset works the same way. Maybe you're still passionate about something, but you've lost faith that you'll actually be able to achieve your goals. Or you think you can handle the activity, but you just don't have that fire in the belly for it anymore.

"The correlation between grit and the right mindset diminishes with increasing age. The willpower and belief that we're getting better aren't as closely linked anymore," says Sigmundsson.

## **No shortcuts—you have to work for results**

So what can we do about this decline in get-up-and-go?

"You have to work to find meaningful activities and interests that you can follow up with grit and willpower. Igniting the spark is important, regardless of age," says Sigmundsson.

You simply have to actively seek what you are passionate about if you haven't already done that. There are no shortcuts.

You need to find and develop your interests. In addition, you have to recognize the important connections between [passion](#), [grit](#) and a positive mindset. You have to keep at it, train and feel free to ally yourself with others who inspire and help you.

This applies to getting better at an activity but also to maintaining what we have already achieved. And that is true not only for our [physical fitness](#), but also for our mental acuity.

"'Use it or lose it' is the mantra, and this aligns with neuropsychology as well," says Sigmundsson.

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Sigmundsson quotes an 85-year-old world champion for old boys skating: "You can never stop."

"Keeping at your chosen activity is the key," says the professor.

**More information:** Hermundur Sigmundsson. Passion, grit and mindset in the ages 14 to 77: Exploring relationship and gender differences, *New Ideas in Psychology* (2020). [DOI: 10.1016/j.newideapsych.2020.100815](#)

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