

Physical activity is associated with other health-related behaviors

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Physical activity is associated with other health-related behaviors. Credit: Irinja Lounassalo.

Results from a recent study by University of Jyväskylä, Finland, showed that not only persistent leisure-time physical activity from childhood to adulthood but also an increasing tendency to engage in physical activities

after childhood or adolescence associated with other health-related behaviors in adulthood.

Adopting an overall healthy lifestyle is important from the public health perspective. A recent study carried out at the Faculty of Sport and Health Sciences at the University of Jyväskylä in Finland investigated whether health-related behaviors in [adulthood](#) differ by diverse leisure-time physical [activity](#) groups studied from childhood to adulthood in men and women. The health-related behaviors under investigation included diet, [screen time](#), smoking, binge drinking, sleep difficulties, and sleep duration.

While the findings corroborated previous findings on the accumulation of healthy behaviors with persistent activity and of unhealthy behaviors with persistent inactivity and low activity, they also highlighted the meaning of increase in the level of leisure-time physical activity. Not only persistent physical activity during the life course but also increased physical activity after childhood or adolescence associated with healthy eating and non-smoking in both genders, having less sleep difficulties in middle-aged women and lower screen time during leisure in increasingly active men.

"The results were encouraging as they suggested that to be physically active in adulthood does not necessarily always require the initiation of a physically active lifestyle already in childhood," says Irinja Lounassalo, a university teacher and a researcher at the University of Jyväskylä.

"Additionally, succeeding in increasing one's physical activity level during the life course may be important. Not only owing to the benefits of physical activity for health, but also because this may relate to the adoption of other health behaviors, in particular switching to a healthier diet."

Associations between physical activity and sedentary [behavior](#) are

complex. For example, an office worker may do vigorous [physical activities](#) regularly, but also spend the majority of the day sedentary. In the current study, men identified as the increasers of physical activity during young adulthood had lower mean leisure screen time in middle-age than their persistently low-active peers but also lower than their persistently active peers. No differences in binge drinking nor sleep duration were found across the diverse leisure-time physical activity groups in women nor in men.

In the future, more research is needed to find out what the different factors are that explain the associations between persistent and increasing physical activity development and the specific health-related behaviors.

"It is important to understand how lifelong healthy behaviors can be created and sustained," says Lounassalo. "For example, by identifying the factors explaining why certain people managed to increase their physical activity level could help to find means to assist physically less active individuals to become more active."

The study was conducted at the University of Jyväskylä in collaboration with LIKES Research Centre for Physical Activity and Health and the universities of Turku, Tampere and Helsinki. Research data were drawn from the ongoing, longitudinal Cardiovascular Risk in Young Finns Study with six age cohorts. Participants were aged nine to 18 years (51 percent females) in 1980 and 33 to 49 years at the last follow-up in 2011.

More information: Irinja Lounassalo et al, Life-course leisure-time physical activity trajectories in relation to health-related behaviors in adulthood: the Cardiovascular Risk in Young Finns study, *BMC Public Health* (2021). [DOI: 10.1186/s12889-021-10554-w](https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-10554-w)

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